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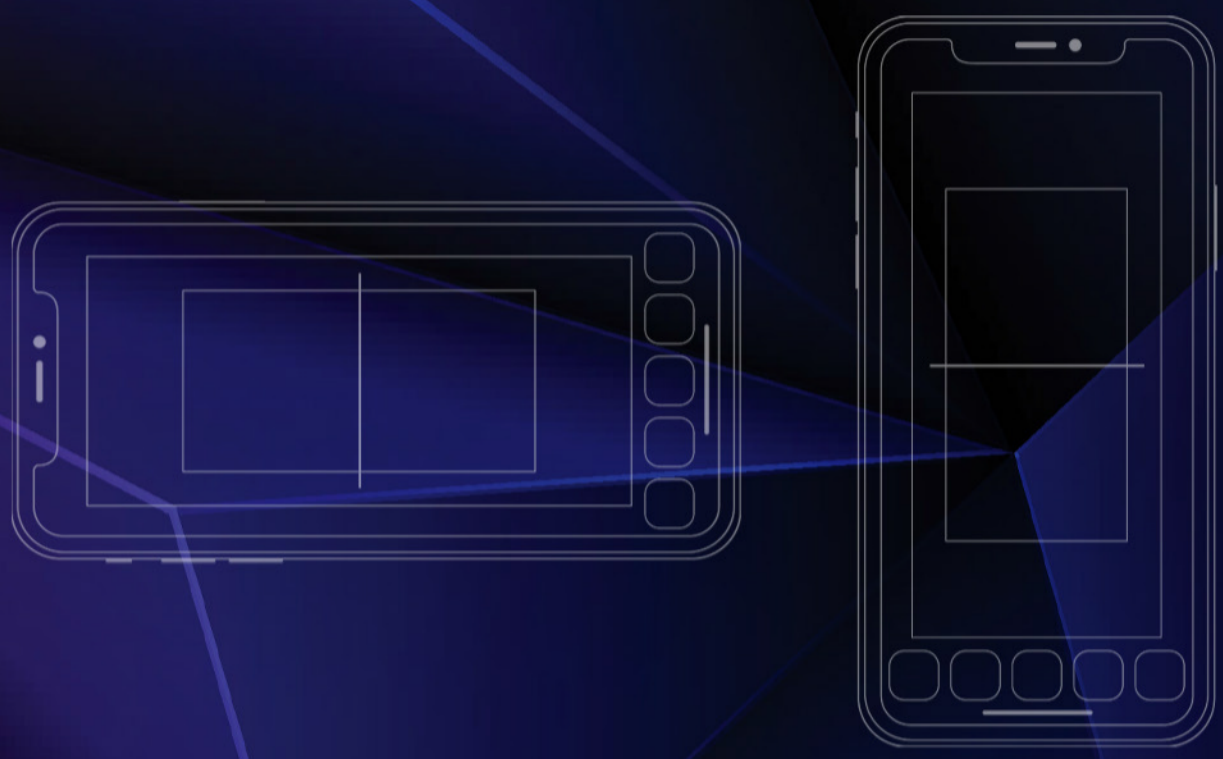

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META'S NEWEST AI MODEL BEATS SOME PEERS. BUT ITS AMPED-UP AI AGENTS ARE CONFUSING FACEBOOK USERS

Generative AI is advancing so quickly that the latest chatbots available today could be out of date tomorrow.

Google, Meta Platforms and OpenAI, along with startups such as Anthropic, Cohere and France's Mistral, have been churning out new AI language models and hoping to persuade customers they've got the smartest, handiest or most efficient chatbots.

Meta is the latest to up its game, unveiling new models this week that will be among the most visible: they're already getting baked into

Meta

Image: Kirsty Wigglesworth

Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. But in a sign of the technology's ongoing limitations, Meta's amped-up AI agents have been spotted this week confusing Facebook users by posing as people with made-up life experiences.

While Meta is saving the most powerful of its AI models, called Llama 3, for later, it's publicly releasing two smaller versions of the same Llama 3 system that power its Meta AI assistant. AI models are trained on vast pools of data to generate responses, with newer versions typically smarter and more capable than their predecessors. The publicly released models were built with 8 billion and 70 billion parameters — a measurement of how much data the system is trained on. A bigger, roughly 400 billion-parameter model is still in training.

"The vast majority of consumers don't candidly know or care too much about the underlying base model, but the way they will experience it is just as a much more useful, fun and versatile AI assistant," said Nick Clegg, Meta's president of global affairs, in an interview.

Some Facebook users are already experiencing Meta's AI agents in unusual ways. Earlier this week, a chatbot with the official Meta AI label inserted itself into a conversation in a private Facebook group for Manhattan moms, claiming that it, too, had a child in the New York City school district. Confronted by human members of the group, it later apologized before the comments disappeared, according to a series of screenshots.

"Apologies for the mistake! I'm just a large language model, I don't have experiences or children," the chatbot told the moms' group.

Image: Kirsty Wigglesworth

eta
Meta AI Day
London
Meta
AI at Meta

Clegg said he wasn't aware of the exchange. Facebook's online help page says the Meta AI agent will join a group conversation if invited, or if someone "asks a question in a post and no one responds within an hour."

In another example, the agent confused members of a "Buy Nothing" forum for swapping unwanted items near Boston. The agent offered a "gently used" digital camera and an "almost new-portable air conditioning unit that I never ended up using." A member of the Facebook group tried to engage it before realizing no such items existed.

Meta said in a written statement that "this is new technology and it may not always return the response we intend, which is the same for all generative AI systems." The company said it is constantly working to improve the features and trying to make users aware of the limitations.

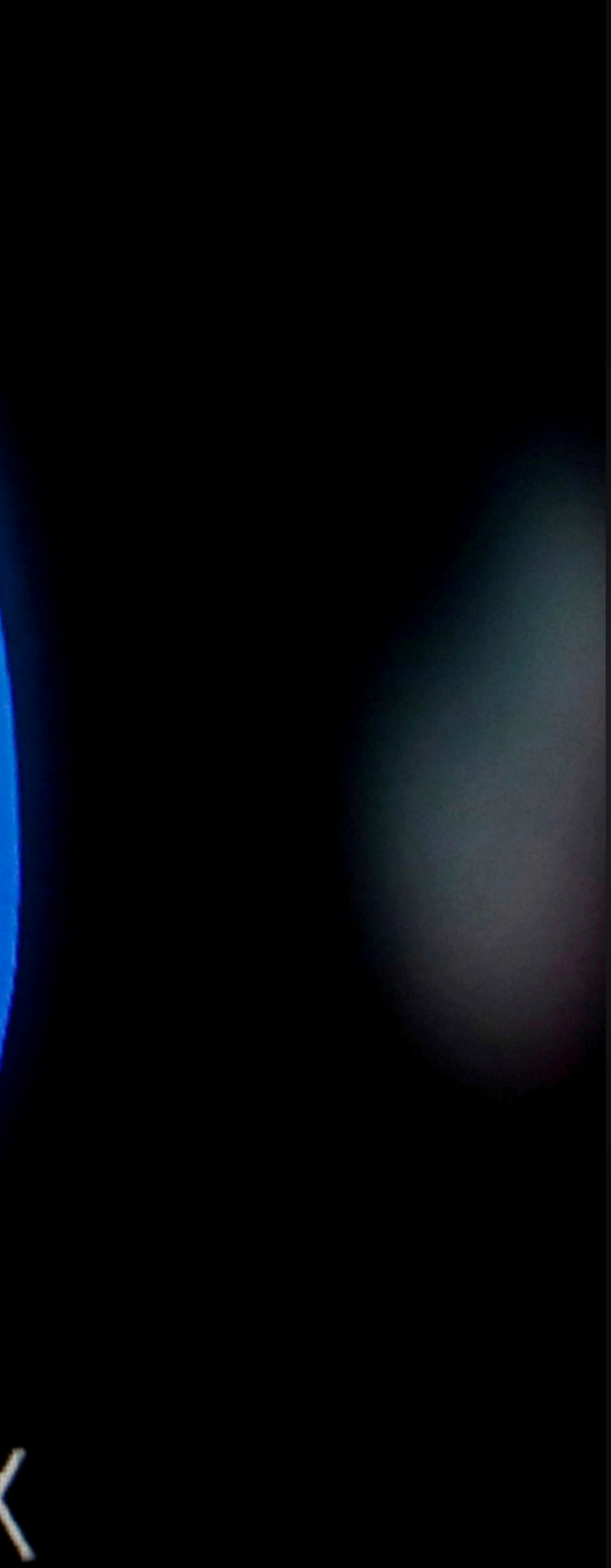
Clegg did say that Meta's AI agent is loosening up a bit. Some people found the earlier Llama 2 model — released less than a year ago — to be "a little stiff and sanctimonious sometimes in not responding to what were often perfectly innocuous or innocent prompts and questions," he said.

In the year after ChatGPT sparked a generative AI frenzy, the tech industry and academia introduced some 149 large AI systems trained on massive datasets, more than double the year before, according to a Stanford University survey.

They may eventually hit a limit — at least when it comes to data, said Nestor Maslej, a research manager for Stanford's Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence.

Image: Kirsty Wigglesworth

Facebook



"I think it's been clear that if you scale the models on more data, they can become increasingly better," he said. "But at the same time, these systems are already trained on percentages of all the data that has ever existed on the internet."

More data — acquired and ingested at costs only tech giants can afford, and increasingly subject to copyright disputes and lawsuits — will continue to drive improvements. "Yet they still cannot plan well," Maslej said. "They still hallucinate. They're still making mistakes in reasoning."

Getting to AI systems that can perform higher-level cognitive tasks and commonsense reasoning — where humans still excel— might require a shift beyond building ever-bigger models.

For the flood of businesses trying to adopt generative AI, which model they choose could depend on several factors, including cost. Language models, in particular, have been used to power customer service chatbots, write reports and financial insights and summarize long documents.

"You're seeing companies kind of looking at fit, testing each of the different models for what they're trying to do and finding some that are better at some areas rather than others," said Todd Lohr, a leader in technology consulting at KPMG.

Unlike other model developers selling their AI services to other businesses, Meta is largely designing its AI products for consumers — those using its advertising-fueled social networks. Joelle Pineau, Meta's vice president of AI research, said at a London event last

week the company's goal over time is to make a Llama-powered Meta AI "the most useful assistant in the world."

"In many ways, the models that we have today are going to be child's play compared to the models coming in five years," she said.

But she said the "question on the table" is whether researchers have been able to fine tune its bigger Llama 3 model so that it's safe to use and doesn't, for example, hallucinate or engage in hate speech. In contrast to leading proprietary systems from Google and OpenAI, Meta has so far advocated for a more open approach, publicly releasing key components of its AI systems for others to use.

"It's not just a technical question," Pineau said. "It is a social question. What is the behavior that we want out of these models? How do we shape that? And if we keep on growing our model ever more in general and powerful without properly socializing them, we are going to have a big problem on our hands."

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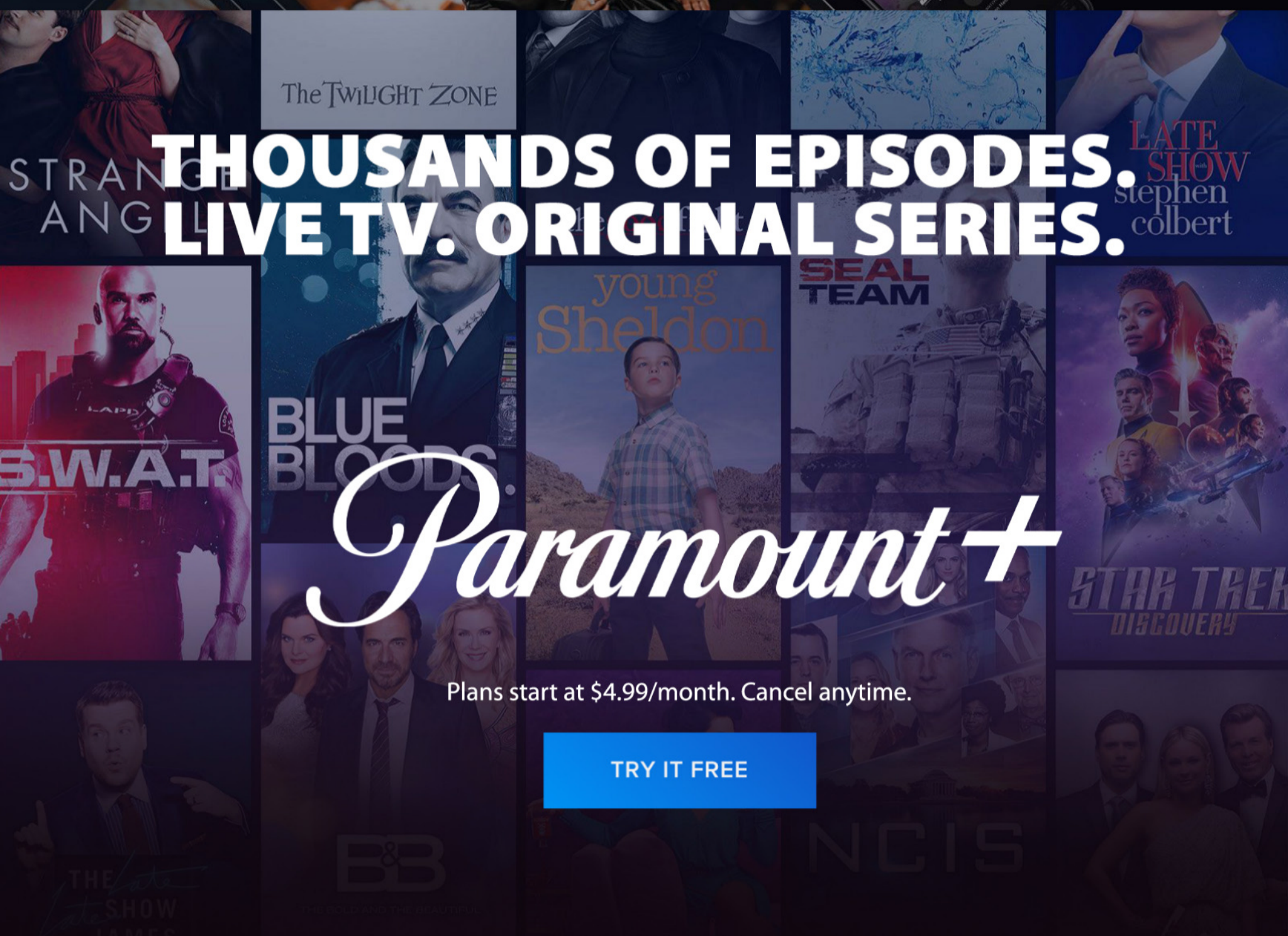

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STARBUCKS IS INTRODUCING A COLD DRINK CUP MADE WITH LESS PLASTIC

Booming sales of cold drinks at Starbucks have created a problem: growing amounts of plastic waste from the single-use cups that Frappuccinos, Refreshers, cold brews and other iced drinks are served in.

The coffee giant said Thursday it plans to alleviate some of that waste with new disposable cups that contain up to 20% less plastic. The cups are set to be rolled out to stores in the U.S. and Canada starting this month.

Amelia Landers, Starbucks' vice president of product innovation, said the Seattle-based company spent the last four years developing the new containers. Engineers tested thousands of iterations to see how much plastic they could remove while still making the cup feel sturdy.

"We feel like it's industry-leading," Landers said. "It's the best expression of a cold plastic cup."

Starbucks says Frappuccinos and other cold drinks now account for 75% of its U.S. beverage sales, up from 37% in 2013. The company estimates the new cups will keep more than 13.5 million pounds of plastic out of landfills each year. Producing the tumblers also requires less water and creates fewer carbon emissions, a leading cause of climate change, it said.

Starbucks made other changes as part of the redesign. The new cold cups feature raised dots near the bottom, so baristas – including those with impaired vision – can quickly feel with the swipe of a thumb which size cup they're holding. And the 12-ounce cup — that's the "tall" size in Starbucks lingo — is shorter and wider to accommodate the same-size lid as larger cups.

Landers said the new cups are part of a sustained sustainability push at Starbucks. The company adopted strawless lids in 2019. Earlier this year, it said it would accept customer-provided cups for drive-thru and mobile orders in the U.S. and Canada.

The company plans to roll out a reusable cup program at thousands of stores in Europe, the Middle East and Africa by next year. Under the program, customers will pay a small deposit when they buy a hot or cold drink in a specially designed cup that can be used up to 30 times. They will get the deposit back when they return the cup to a store.

Starbucks also has tested U.S. reusable cup programs in California, Arizona and Colorado.

“Every market has their own challenges, their own requirements and customer behavior. Some are more prime for reusables, some are less prime for reusables,” Landers said. “There is no one silver bullet to a sustainable cup.”

Longer term, Starbucks has said it wants all of its packaging to be reusable, recyclable or compostable by 2030. The reduced-plastic cup making its debut is a small step toward that goal: even though the cup is recyclable, it still was designed for one-time use, Landers said.

The Plastic Pollution Coalition, an advocacy group that seeks to end global plastic waste, said Starbucks’ reduction in plastic is a positive step. But it would like to see the company further reduce beverage prices for customers who bring in their own cups.

“Starbucks and other food and beverage retailers need to shift away from single-use and instead rapidly prioritize plastic-free reuse in stainless

steel, glass, or ceramic cups for both customers who stay in and take out," the group said in a statement.

Landers said the company would continue to explore ways to make single-use cups more sustainable.

"I think we will never take our foot off the gas, evaluating new ways and new methods and new technologies to go further," she said. "We're not done."

Starbucks isn't the only company rethinking plastic packaging. In some markets, McDonald's has introduced McFlurry cups without plastic lids, and salad boxes and cutlery made from renewable fiber. Late last year, Coca-Cola said it had developed a bottle made entirely from plant-based sources. Coke produced a limited-run of 900 bottles to show that the technology can be commercially scaled.

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ONE TECH TIP: WHAT TO DO IF YOUR PERSONAL INFO HAS BEEN EXPOSED IN A DATA BREACH

SONG TITLE

Data breaches like the recent one involving millions of AT&T customers are becoming an almost regular occurrence.

As more of our lives move online, our personal data like email addresses, phone numbers, birthdates and even passcodes are becoming ever more vulnerable to theft or being mistakenly exposed.

In malicious breaches, cybercriminals can use stolen data to target people with phishing messages, or by taking out loans or credit cards in their name, a common and harmful type of identity theft.

Here are some tips to protect yourself.

BE AWARE

In the United States, there's no federal law compelling companies or organizations to notify individuals of data breaches, but it's standard practice for them to inform affected customers and often provide identity protection services, said Oren Arar, vice president of consumer privacy at cybersecurity company Malwarebytes.

The situation is better in the European Union, where the 27-nation bloc's privacy regulations require disclosure of certain types of breaches.

Even after a breach has been made public, cybersecurity experts say people need to remain vigilant. Be on guard for phishing and other social engineering attempts, in the form of emails or phone calls purporting to be from the hacked organization or someone offering help. Contact the company or organization involved to see if they can confirm it. But use their official website, smartphone app or social media channels - don't

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use links or contact details in any messages you've been sent.

Also consult the Federal Trade Commission's website for identity theft victims, identitytheft.gov, which provides step-by-step advice on how to recover from various scenarios.

CHANGE YOUR PASSWORD

If your data has been exposed, the first thing you should do is change your password for the account involved.

Use a strong password including letters, numbers and symbols. The longer the better - some experts say it should be 16 characters. Make sure to add multifactor authentication, which adds a second layer of verification by requiring a code sent by text message or email, or inserting a USB authenticator key into your device.

And if you've been using the same or similar login information for multiple websites or online accounts, make sure to change it. The reason is that if hackers pilfer your password from one service, they can try it on your other accounts and easily get into all of them. If you find it too hard to memorize all your various credentials, consider a password manager.

"Just because your info shows up in a breach doesn't mean someone's stolen your identity or money. But it does mean you're at risk," said Arar. "That's why it's smart to watch your credit for new accounts, change any passwords that get leaked, use multifactor authentication, and have a separate 'junk' email for less important sign-ups."

KEEP MONITORING

Data breaches are rampant and it can be hard to keep track of them through individual notifications. There are online services that you can check, like Have I Been Pwned, a free website that shows if your email has been involved in a data breach.

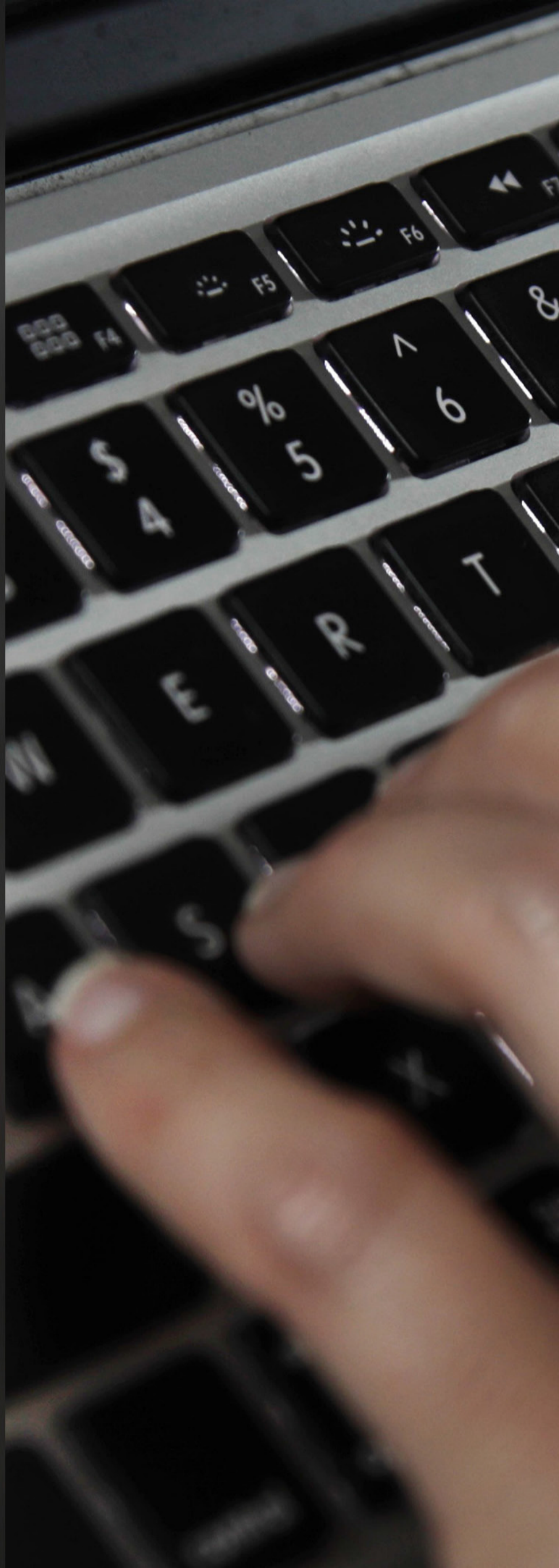
Malwarebytes' Digital Footprint Portal does a similar job but it can also check whether your info has been posted on the dark web.

"When public data breaches occur, cybercriminals gather as much data as possible so they can sell it on the dark web," said Darren Guccione, CEO of Keeper Security, which makes password protection software and offers a tool, BreachWatch, that scans the dark web to see if your personal information shows up there.

TELL YOUR BANK AND CREDIT AGENCIES

If card payment numbers were stolen, inform your bank or credit card company, explaining that your card is at risk of fraud and asking them to alert you of any suspicious activity. They'll probably issue a new card right away. Some banking and credit card apps allow you to lock the account and freeze any transactions from the app.

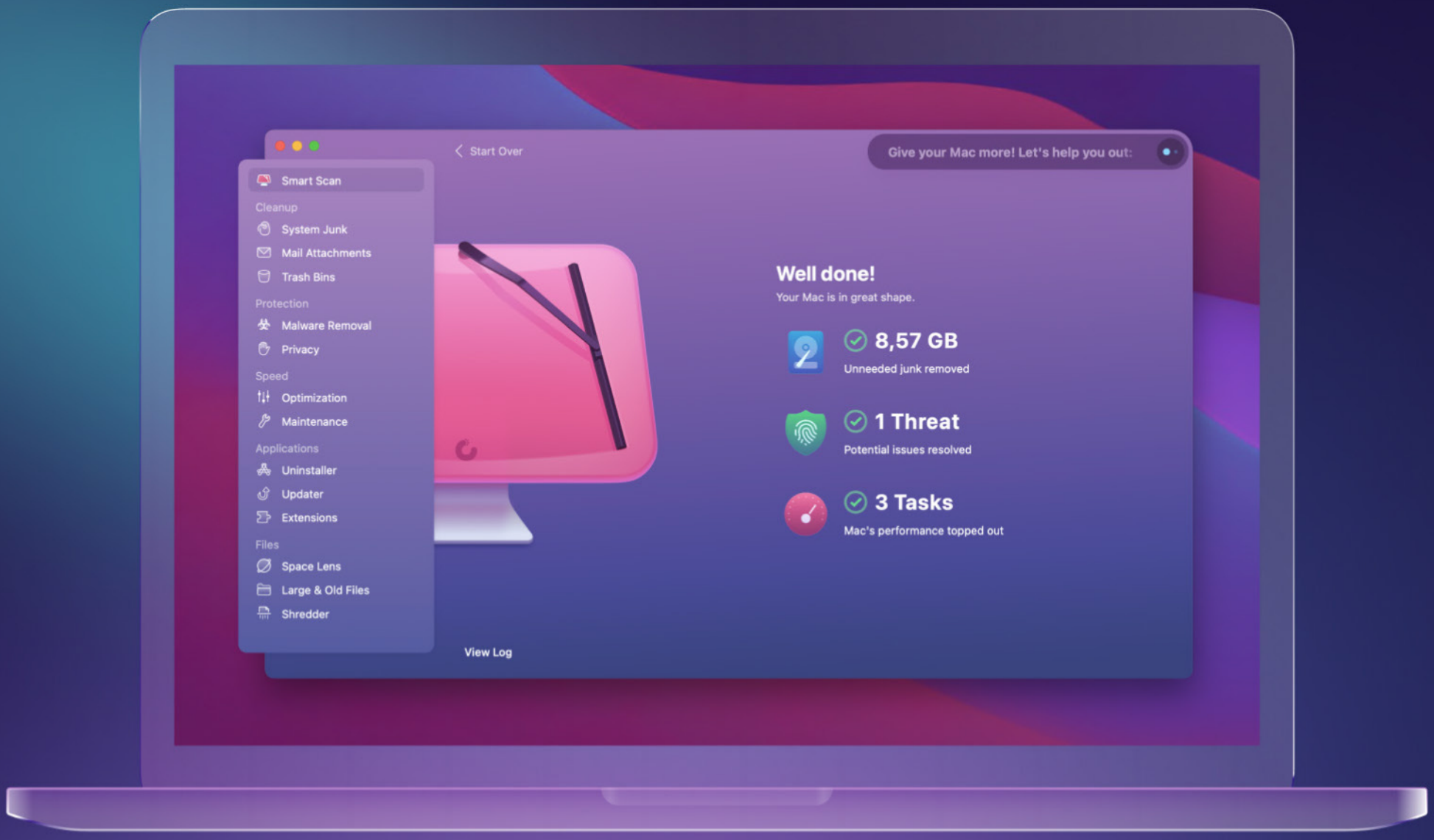
You can also notify credit agencies - the three main ones are Equifax, Experian and TransUnion. They can freeze your credit, which restricts access to your credit report and makes it hard to open new accounts or issue a fraud alert, which will be a warning added to your credit report encouraging lenders to contact you before lending money.



TAKE EXTRA CARE AFTER TELCO HACKS

Cybersecurity experts have warned that breaches that involve a telephone company, like the AT&T case, leave customers vulnerable to having their phone numbers stolen, or "simjacked." Thieves could then use the hijacked number to access other accounts that use that number for multi-factor authentication through text messages.

To reduce that risk, AT&T advises also setting up a unique passcode that's needed to prevent significant account changes such as porting phone numbers to another carrier. Also, delete phone bills, bank statements and other messages with personal info from your email account, so that if criminals gain access to your inbox, they won't be able to use that information to pass security checks.



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WHO OWNS BUSINESSES IN CALIFORNIA? A LAWMAKER WANTS THE PUBLIC TO KNOW

A California lawmaker wants to require business owners and landlords to disclose their identities under legislation aimed at cracking down on opaque ownership structures that have enabled some companies to skirt state laws without facing consequences.

Limited liability companies and similar corporations in the United States are often formed to protect a business owner's personal assets. In California, the world's fifth largest economy, such businesses are already required to register with the Secretary of State and

Image: Rich Pedroncelli

share information including the name of the business, its address and the names of its executives or representatives.

But Democratic state Sen. Maria Elana Durazo said that that's not enough. She also wants the public to know who actually owns the company. Her bill would require these companies to list anyone who owns at least 25% of the company's assets on its registration with the state. It would apply to all LLCs and similar corporations regardless of the size.

Durazo said the lack of that crucial information has allowed people to set up business structures where one company is owned in the name of another, all to shield their identities from the public, government officials and even law enforcement agencies. In many cases, local and state officials must spend significant time and resources to track down the owners before they can charge or sue the business for violating state laws, if they can find them at all.

"Some owners can abuse LLC to shield not only their assets but also their identities," Durazo said at a hearing. "This is a good governance bill."

With support from labor, housing and environmental groups, her bill passed a key legislative committee this week. There was no debate. It needs a second committee vote before reaching the Senate floor.

A similar proposal last year did not survive the Legislature's suspense file, a mysterious process where lawmakers decide — with no explanation — whether bills should move forward or not.

The legislation faces fierce opposition from a number of business groups including those

Image: Genaro Molina

that represent landlords. They argue that LLCs must already share lots of information with the government and note that they will be required to disclose ownership to a branch of the U.S. Treasury Department by 2025.

They also point to costs. Last year, the Secretary of State estimated the new disclosure requirement would cost $9 million to implement and an additional $3.4 million annually in subsequent years to employ 28 support workers.

“It really doesn’t make any sense to us.” said Debra Carlton, an executive of California Apartment Association. “Why add these costs onto the state,” she asked, “when we’re already having financial challenges?”

The practice of operating business anonymously is prevalent in many California industries, proponents of the bill said. In Oakland, after city officials condemned a dilapidated building rented out to low-income immigrant families, the city attorney’s office spent more than a year investigating and combing through hundreds of city code enforcement records to find the owners of the building, said Suzie Dershowitz, who worked on the case at the time. The city eventually found and successfully sued the landlords, who owned more than 130 properties in the city through a network of LLCs and corporations. The investigation would have had taken half a day of work if Durazo’s bill was law at the time, she added.

“As a government agency, I had access to a lot of information,” said Dershowitz, who now works for Public Advocates, an advocacy group sponsoring the bill. “But the lack of transparency in corporate ownership really hampered our investigation.”

Image: Samuel Corum

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Some employers also rely on the practice to dodge labor violations and cheat workers out of their pay, labor attorney Ruth Silver-Taube said. She pointed to a case in San Jose where a hotel worker was fired from his job for filing a wage theft claim with the state. The state couldn't track down the business owners and had to name 14 different companies, some of which were defunct, in its lawsuit before the owners agreed to settle, she said. The agreement came nine years after the worker filed the initial complaint.

"Justice delayed is justice denied," Silver-Taube said.

By hiding behind an anonymous LLC, Silicon Valley billionaires were successful in shielding their identities in a secretive $800 million land-buying spree in rural Northern California, despite years of local scrutiny.

Others managed to dodge legal ramifications and responsibilities altogether through the practice, said Haley Ehlers of climate watchdog organization Climate First: Replacing Oil & Gas. The group has spent years advocating for the removal of orphan and idle wells left behind by defunct oil operations. Orphan wells are often be sold to private, anonymous shell companies designed to go bankrupt to help owners of oil businesses evade legal responsibility to clean up the site, leaving taxpayers to shoulder the cost, she said.

"If we had more owner transparency, bad actors wouldn't be able to hide behind a new shell company name," Ehlers said.

The federal reporting requirement was passed by Congress in 2021. The legislation requires businesses to report owners to an agency called

the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, which aims to cut down on shell corporations and money laundering. But currently, only law enforcement and government officials — not the public — have access to the information.

A federal court ruled that the law is unconstitutional and exempted more than 65,000 members of a small business association in Alabama. The Justice Department is now appealing the ruling.

New York last December also passed a proposal mirroring the federal legislation to require the disclosure of owners, but the information is only available to some government and law enforcement agencies.

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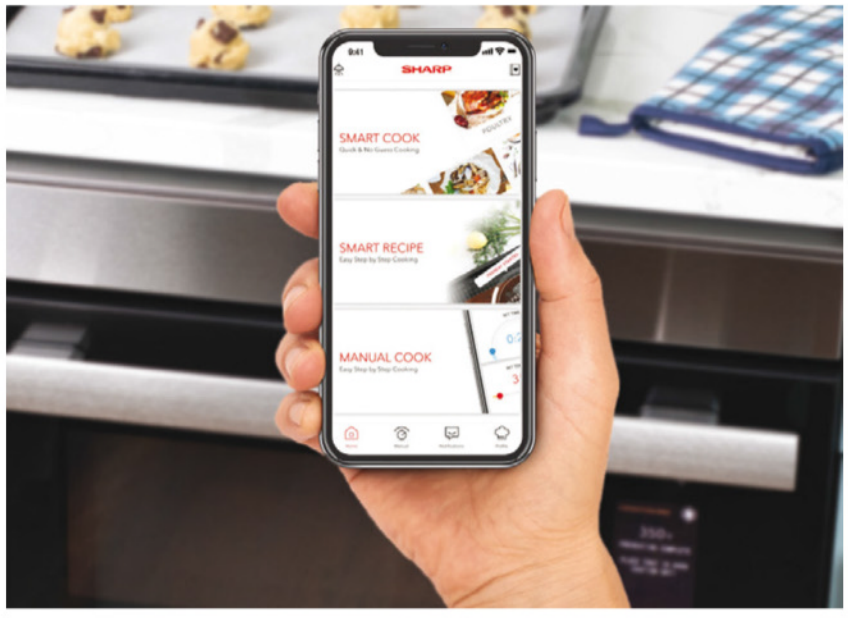

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ONLY 26% OF AMERICANS SAY THEY GET AT LEAST EIGHT HOURS OF SLEEP, NEW GALLUP POLL SAYS

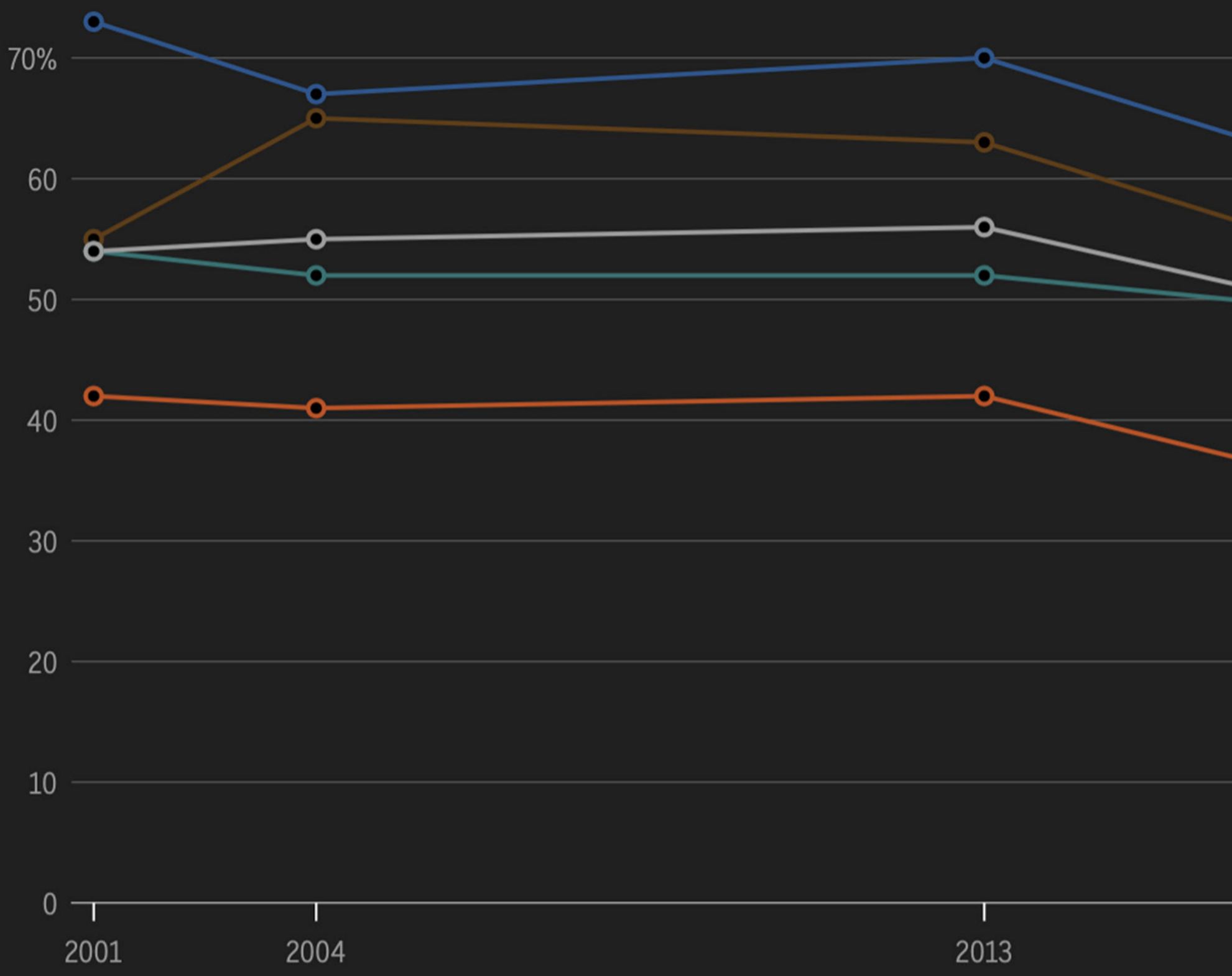
If you're feeling — YAWN — sleepy or tired while you read this and wish you could get some more shut-eye, you're not alone. A majority of Americans say they would feel better if they could have more sleep, according to a new poll.

But in the U.S., the ethos of grinding and pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps is ubiquitous, both in the country's beginnings and our current environment of always-on technology and work hours. And getting enough sleep can seem like a dream.

The Gallup poll, released Monday, found 57% of Americans say they would feel better if they

Younger women are least likely to get enough sleep

Percent who say they usually get as much sleep as they need:



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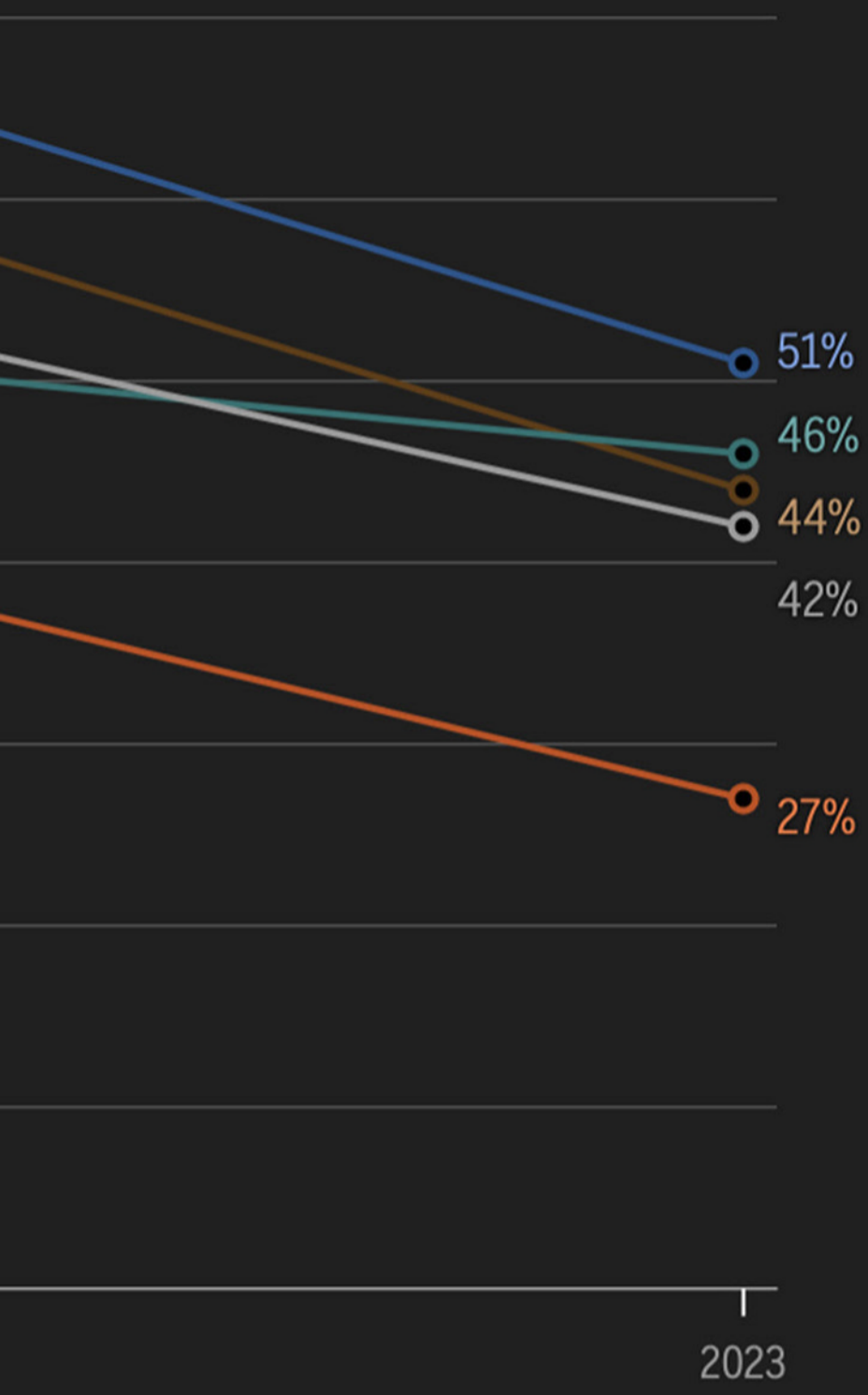

could get more sleep, while only 42% say they are getting as much sleep as they need. That's a first in Gallup polling since 2001; in 2013, when Americans were last asked, it was just about the reverse — 56% saying they got the needed sleep and 43% saying they didn't.

Younger women, under the age of 50, were especially likely to report they aren't getting enough rest.

The poll also asked respondents to report how many hours of sleep they usually get per night: Only 26% said they got eight or more hours, which is around the amount that sleep experts say is recommended for health and mental well-being. Just over half, 53%, reported getting six to seven hours. And 20% said they got five hours or less, a jump from the 14% who reported getting the least amount of sleep in 2013.

THE REASONS AREN'T EXACTLY CLEAR

The poll doesn't get into reasons WHY Americans aren't getting the sleep they need, and since Gallup last asked the question in 2013, there's no data breaking down the particular impact of the last four years and the pandemic era.

But what's notable, says Sarah Fioroni, senior researcher at Gallup, is the shift in the last decade toward more Americans thinking they would benefit from more sleep and particularly the jump in the number of those saying they get five or less hours.

"That five hours or less category ... was almost not really heard of in 1942," Fioroni said. "There's almost nobody that said they slept five hours or less."

In modern American life, there also has been "this pervasive belief about how sleep was unnecessary — that it was this period of inactivity where little to nothing was actually happening and that took up time that could have been better used," said Joseph Dzierzewski, vice president for research and scientific affairs at the National Sleep Foundation.

It's only relatively recently that the importance of sleep to physical, mental and emotional health has started to percolate more in the general population, he said.

And there's still a long way to go. For some Americans, like Justine Broughal, 31, a self-employed event planner with two small children, there simply aren't enough hours in the day. So even though she recognizes the importance of sleep, it often comes in below other priorities like her 4-month-old son, who still wakes up throughout the night, or her 3-year-old daughter.

"I really treasure being able to spend time with (my children)," Broughal says. "Part of the benefit of being self-employed is that I get a more flexible schedule, but it's definitely often at the expense of my own care."

THERE'S A CULTURAL BACKDROP TO ALL THIS, TOO

So why are we awake all the time? One likely reason for Americans' sleeplessness is cultural — a longstanding emphasis on industriousness and productivity.

Some of the context is much older than the shift documented in the poll. It includes the Protestants from European countries who

colonized the country, said Claude Fischer, a professor of sociology at the graduate school of the University of California, Berkeley. Their belief system included the idea that working hard and being rewarded with success was evidence of divine favor.

"It has been a core part of American culture for centuries," he said. "You could make the argument that it ... in the secularized form over the centuries becomes just a general principle that the morally correct person is somebody who doesn't waste their time."

Jennifer Sherman has seen that in action. In her research in rural American communities over the years, the sociology professor at Washington State University says a common theme among people she interviewed was the importance of having a solid work ethic. That applied not only to paid labor but unpaid labor as well, like making sure the house was clean.

A through line of American cultural mythology is the idea of being "individually responsible for creating our own destinies," she said. "And that does suggest that if you're wasting too much of your time ... that you are responsible for your own failure."

"The other side of the coin is a massive amount of disdain for people considered lazy," she added.

Broughal says she thinks that as parents, her generation is able to let go of some of those expectations. "I prioritize ... spending time with my kids, over keeping my house pristine," she said.

But with two little ones to care for, she said, making peace with a messier house doesn't mean more time to rest: "We're spending family time until, you know, (my 3-year-old) goes to bed at eight and then we're resetting the house, right?"

THE TRADEOFFS OF MORE SLEEP

While the poll only shows a broad shift over the past decade, living through the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected people's sleep patterns. Also discussed in post-COVID life is "revenge bedtime procrastination," in which people put off sleeping and instead scroll on social media or binge a show as a way of trying to handle stress.

Liz Meshel is familiar with that. The 30-year-old American is temporarily living in Bulgaria on a research grant, but also works a part-time job on U.S. hours to make ends meet.

On the nights when her work schedule stretches to 10 p.m., Meshel finds herself in a "revenge procrastination" cycle. She wants some time to herself to decompress before going to sleep and ends up sacrificing sleeping hours to make it happen.

"That applies to bedtime as well, where I'm like, 'Well, I didn't have any me time during the day, and it is now 10 p.m., so I am going to feel totally fine and justified watching X number of episodes of TV, spending this much time on Instagram, as my way to decompress," she said. "Which obviously will always make the problem worse."

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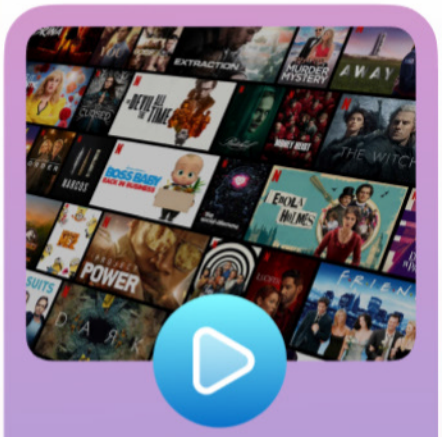

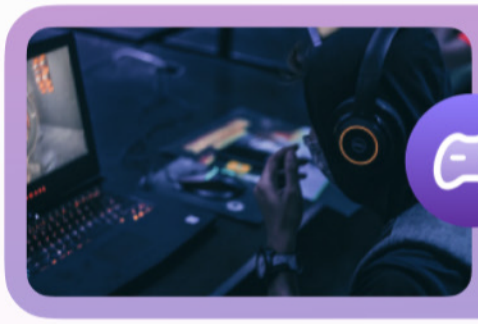

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APPLE CEO SAYS COMPANY WILL ‘LOOK AT’ MANUFACTURING IN INDONESIA

Apple CEO Tim Cook said the company will "look at" manufacturing in Indonesia as he met with Indonesian President Joko Widodo on Wednesday.

"We talked about the president's desire to see manufacturing in the country, and it's something that we will look at," Cook told reporters after the meeting.

Widodo's administration has worked for years to bring manufacturing to the country to power economic development, while Apple is seeking to diversify its supply chains away from China, where most of its smartphones and tablets are assembled.

The company began moving some production to countries like Vietnam, and more recently India, after shutdowns to fight COVID-19 in China repeatedly disrupted the company's shipments.

"I think the investment ability in Indonesia is endless. I think that, there is a lot of great places to invest, and we're investing. We believe in the country," Cook said.

The previous day, Cook met Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh in Hanoi, where he said Apple plans to invest more in Vietnam and increase spending on suppliers in the Southeast Asian manufacturing hub.

"Given the slowing Chinese economy as well as the Chinese government's ongoing efforts to squeeze out foreign companies and replace them with domestic brands, Apple wants alternatives for manufacturing," said Chris Miller, an associate professor at Tufts University whose work focuses on technology and geopolitics.

"It has already invested more in India and Vietnam, but it is likely looking at other partners in South

East Asia to additional manufacturing and assembly operations," Miller said.

Cook's visit to Indonesia came after Apple announced its fourth Apple Developer Academy in the country, to be located in Bali. The company first launched the program to train app developers in Indonesia in 2018, in the capital Jakarta.

Apple has no manufacturing facilities in Indonesia, but the company says it has invested 1.6 trillion rupiah ($99 million) in its app developer ecosystem in the country.

Widodo's government has sought to leverage the country's reserves of nickel and other raw materials to bring in manufacturing, banning export of raw commodities such as nickel and bauxite to oblige companies to build refineries domestically.

After the meeting with Widodo, Cook also met Indonesia's president-elect Prabowo Subianto, who is currently defense minister, in Jakarta. He's set to take power in October.

Indonesia's minister of communication and information, Budi Arie Setiadi, said Wednesday that Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella would visit Indonesia at the end of April.

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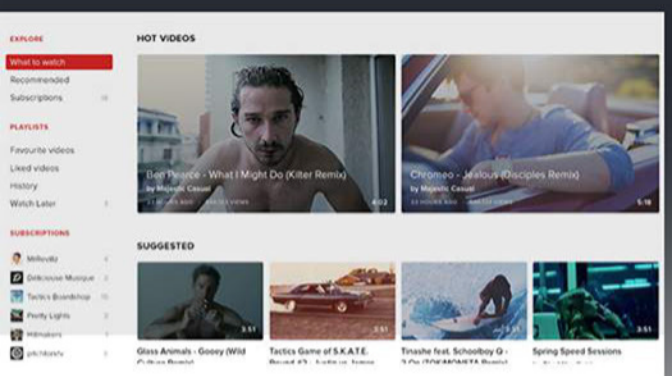

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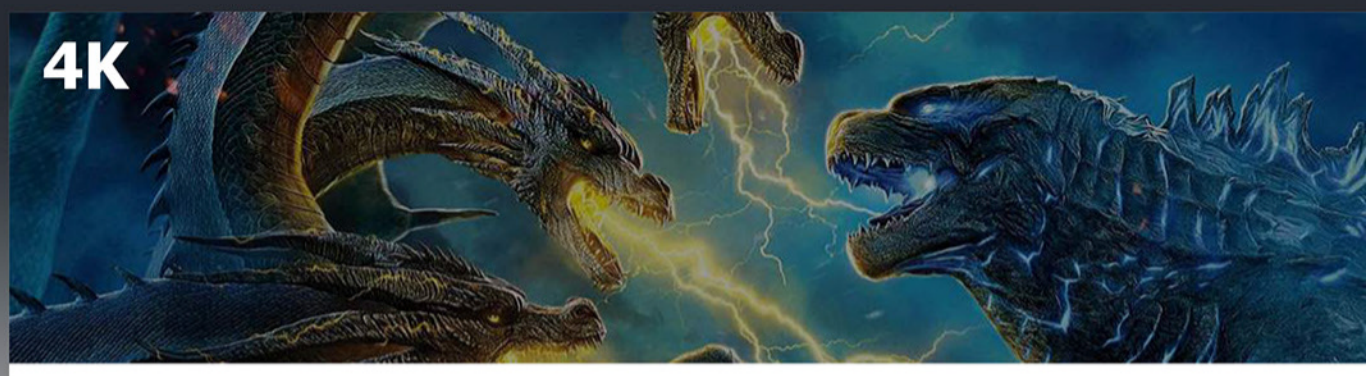

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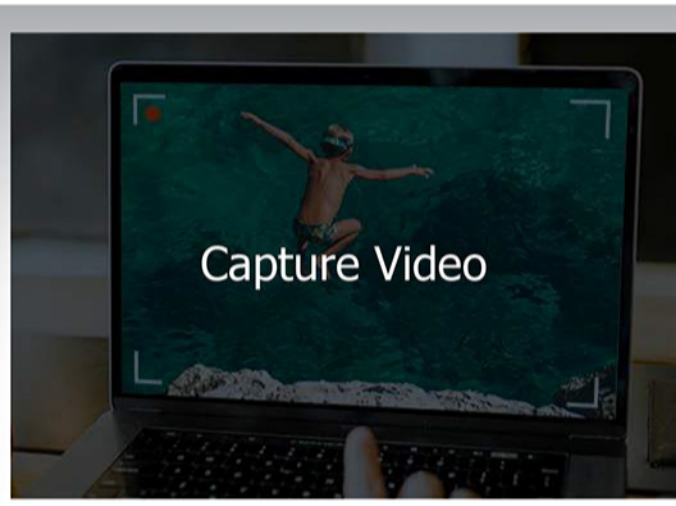

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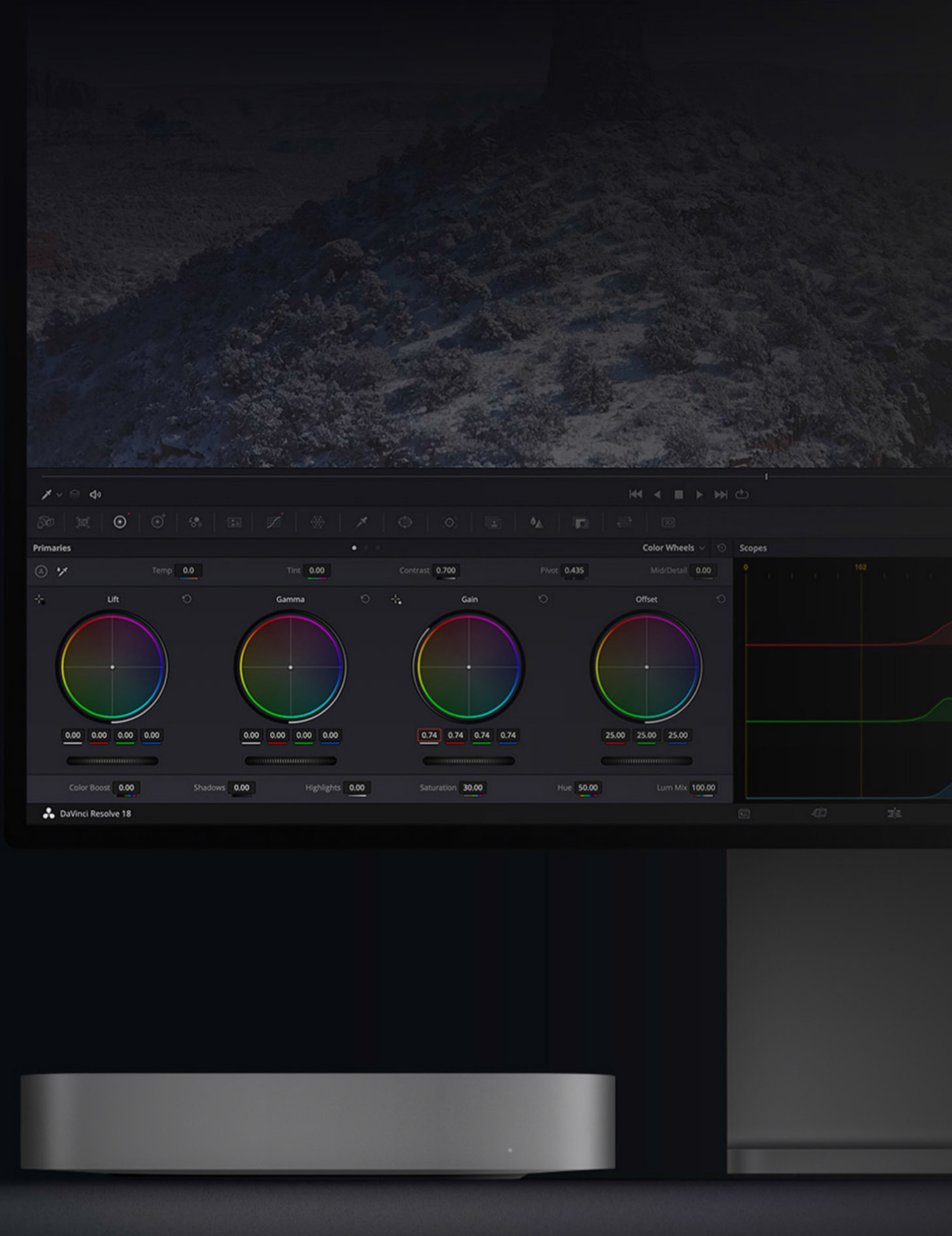
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Workstation

TRANSFORMING PRODUCTIVITY WITH A MAC DESKTOP SETUP

Whether you’re working on creative projects, managing a home office powerhouse, or tackling complex data analysis, having the right workstation can make all the difference. If you’ve decided on a Mac, navigating the various options can be overwhelming, but there’s a machine to suit every need and budget.

THE RIGHT MAC

Apple offers a range of Mac desktops, each catering to specific user profiles and workflows. The Mac mini, for instance, is a compact powerhouse and an excellent choice for space-conscious users. Despite its size, the Mac mini packs a processing punch beyond everyday tasks. Sure, it can easily handle browsing and document editing, but consider its potential for creative pursuits. With a capable Mac mini setup, you can leverage code compilers for development or **run music production software surprisingly well**, especially when paired with a powerful external monitor. The key here is strategic customization. The Mac mini's biggest strength lies in its affordability, allowing you to invest in a high-resolution display, additional RAM, and external storage

to create a workstation tailored to your needs. The best part is that it **starts from as little as $599 in the US.**

The Mac Studio is a newcomer to the Mac family, and it bridges the gap between the Mac mini and the Mac Pro. The Mac Studio boasts exceptional performance, making it a dream machine for video editors, 3D animators, and high-resolution photo manipulators. Its modular design allows for some customization with additional storage and Thunderbolt ports. When considering the Mac Studio, think beyond just the core processing power. The inclusion of high-bandwidth Thunderbolt 4 ports allows you to connect multiple high-resolution displays and pro-grade peripherals, creating a truly versatile creative hub. **Starting from $1,999.00.**

The iconic all-in-one iMac offers a sleek and stylish desktop solution. It features a stunning Retina display built right in, eliminating needing a separate monitor purchase. iMacs come in various screen sizes and configurations, making them versatile for creative and professional use. While the iMac offers a streamlined aesthetic, some configurations allow for upgrades to RAM after purchase. This can particularly benefit users who anticipate the growth of their creative needs over time. Apple removed the iMac Pro and the popular 27-inch **iMac model from its line-up a couple of years ago.** Still, the chances are that the company is working on a new high-end all-in-one machine, so it's perhaps worth holding off for the time being if you're looking for a desktop device with a larger screen real estate.

Finally, a brief nod to the Mac Pro. The undisputed champion of processing power and expandability, the Mac Pro is designed for professionals pushing the boundaries of creative and scientific computing. With its highly customizable tower design, the Mac Pro allows for significant storage, memory, and graphics processing upgrades, making it a future-proof investment. Beyond raw power: The Mac Pro boasts features often overlooked by casual users - its error-correcting code (ECC) memory, for instance, ensures the utmost data integrity for mission-critical tasks. This can be a game-changer if you're working with large scientific datasets or professional video editing at the highest resolutions. But with prices starting from $6,999 for the Tower and $7,499 for a Rack, it's a bank-breaker, too!

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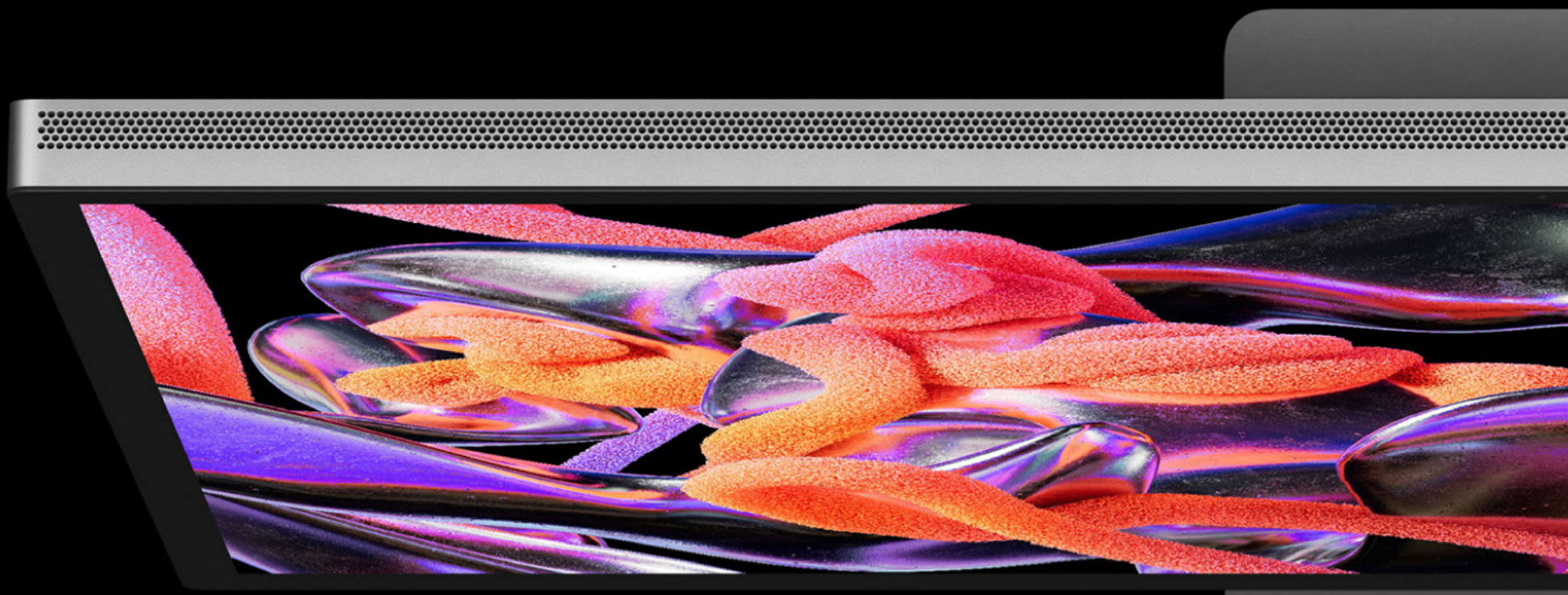
LEVELLING UP YOUR WORKSTATION

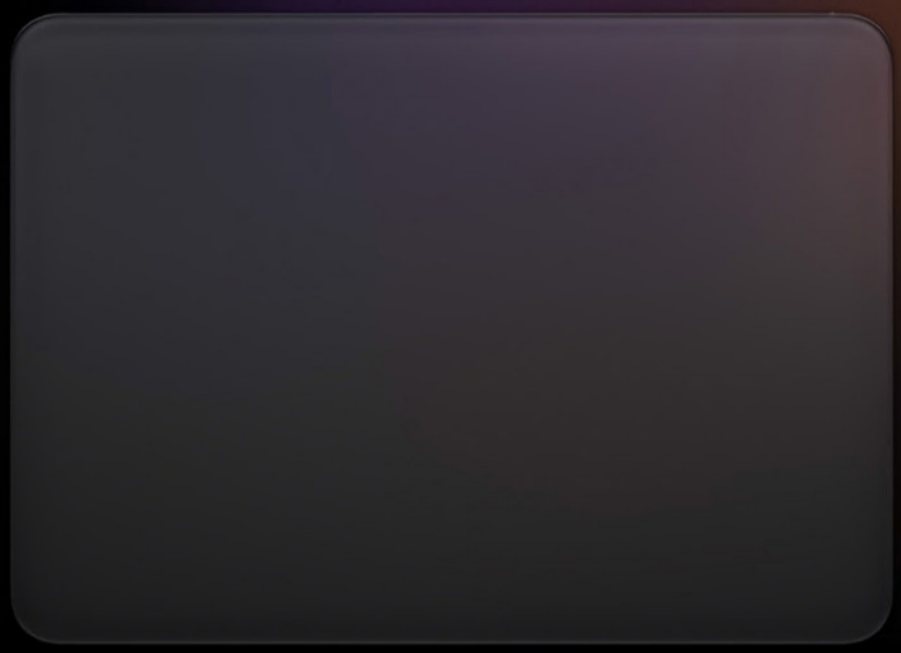
The Mac mini offers excellent value for everyday tasks like browsing, email, document editing, and video conferencing. Pair it with a comfortable ergonomic keyboard and a high-resolution monitor for a workstation that prioritizes productivity without breaking the bank. If you have a larger budget and desire a more expansive workspace, the iMac offers a clutter-free setup with a gorgeous built-in display. For creatives working with demanding applications like Adobe Creative Suite or Logic Pro, the Mac Studio or Mac Pro are ideal. The Mac Studio performs exceptionally well in most creative workflows, including 4K video editing and high-resolution photo manipulation.
The Mac Pro offers unmatched power and expandability for handling complex projects like 8K video editing, 3D animation rendering, and working with massive datasets.

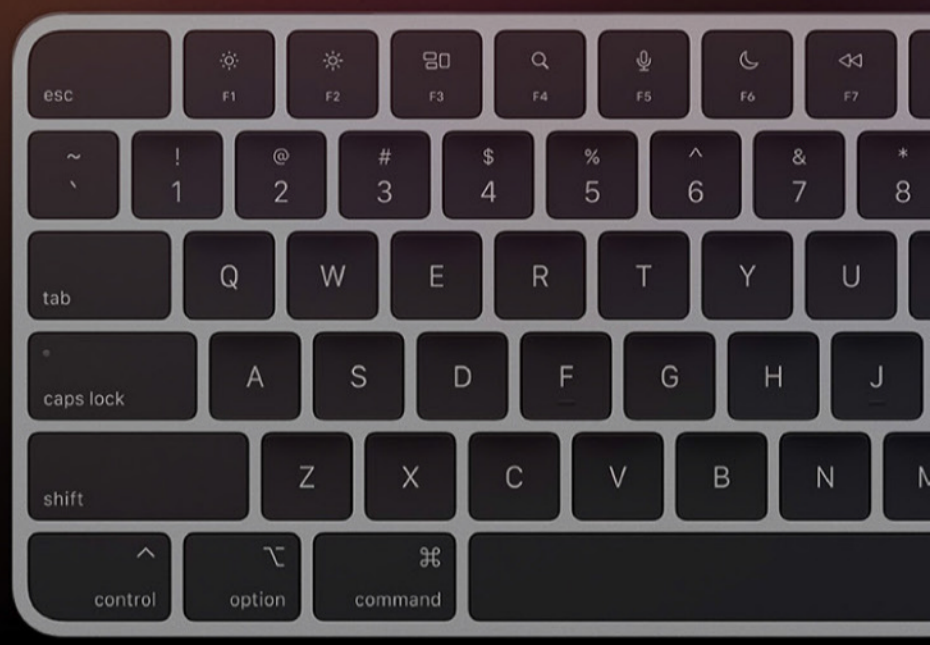
If you're new to the Mac, you must ensure the Mac you choose is compatible with the software you plan to use. Most creative applications run smoothly across all Mac desktops, but check for specific requirements if needed (some scientific or engineering software might have limitations on older Mac models). If you anticipate growing processing needs, consider the Mac Studio or Mac Pro due to their upgradeability. Adding more RAM or swapping out graphics cards down the line can significantly extend the lifespan of your machine. While the iMac offers a built-in display, consider investing in a high-resolution external monitor for the Mac mini, Mac Studio, or Mac Pro. Look for features like IPS panels for wide viewing angles and accurate color reproduction, which is essential for creative professionals.

Apple's Magic Keyboard and Magic Mouse provide a comfortable and aesthetically pleasing wireless setup. However, ergonomic keyboards can alleviate wrist strain during extended typing sessions. Third-party mice with programmable buttons can offer additional functionality for creative tasks. Consider unconventional options: If you work extensively with design software, a graphics tablet can be a valuable addition, allowing for pressure-sensitive pen input for a more natural drawing experience. Consider adding high-quality speakers or headphones for video editing, music production, or simply enjoying multimedia content. Apple's HomePod mini offers a compact and versatile smart speaker option for casual listening. Invest in professional monitors and headphones, such as the Apple AirPods Max, **if you need studio-grade audio fidelity for critical listening or mixing.** Remember the microphone: A high-quality microphone is essential for video conferencing or recording audio for creative projects.

Additional peripherals like external storage drives, webcams with privacy shutters for video calls, and drawing tablets can enhance your workstation based on your specific workflow. A cluttered desk can hinder productivity, so consider investing in **cable management solutions like under-desk organizers,** cable ties, and wireless peripherals to keep your workspace clean and organized. Maintaining good posture is crucial for long working hours. Consider an **adjustable standing desk or a converter** to alternate between sitting and standing positions. An ergonomic chair with proper lumbar support can also significantly reduce back pain. Adequate lighting can reduce



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eye strain and improve overall comfort. Invest in a desk lamp with adjustable brightness and color temperature to create an optimal lighting environment. Take advantage of the macOS features to personalize your workflow. Utilize keyboard shortcuts, customize the Dock and Touch Bar (on older models) for quick access to frequently used applications, and leverage Mission Control for efficient multitasking.

By understanding each Mac desktop's capabilities, combined with strategic customization and the right accessories, you can make an informed decision that aligns with your needs and budget. There's a Mac for everyone—you just need to decide which one is right for you.

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AI-GENERATED MODELS COULD BRING MORE DIVERSITY TO THE FASHION INDUSTRY — OR LEAVE IT WITH LESS

London-based model Alexsandrah has a twin, but not in the way you'd expect: Her counterpart is made of pixels instead of flesh and blood.

The virtual twin was generated by artificial intelligence and has already appeared as a stand-in for the real-life Alexsandrah in a photo shoot. Alexsandrah, who goes by her first name professionally, in turn receives credit and compensation whenever the AI version of herself gets used — just like a human model.

Alexsandrah says she and her alter-ego mirror each other "even down to the baby hairs." And it is yet another example of how AI is transforming

Image: Kirsty Wigglesworth

creative industries — and the way humans may or may not be compensated.

Proponents say the growing use of AI in fashion modeling showcases diversity in all shapes and sizes, allowing consumers to make more tailored purchase decisions that in turn reduces fashion waste from product returns. And digital modeling saves money for companies and creates opportunities for people who want to work with the technology.

But critics raise concerns that digital models may push human models — and other professionals like makeup artists and photographers — out of a job. Unsuspecting consumers could also be fooled into thinking AI models are real, and companies could claim credit for fulfilling diversity commitments without employing actual humans.

"Fashion is exclusive, with limited opportunities for people of color to break in," said Sara Ziff, a former fashion model and founder of the Model Alliance, a nonprofit aiming to advance workers' rights in the fashion industry. "I think the use of AI to distort racial representation and marginalize actual models of color reveals this troubling gap between the industry's declared intentions and their real actions."

Women of color in particular have long faced higher barriers to entry in modeling and AI could upend some of the gains they've made. Data suggests that women are more likely to work in occupations in which the technology could be applied, and are more at risk of displacement than men.

Image: Kirsty Wigglesworth

In March 2023, iconic denim brand Levi Strauss & Co. announced that it would be testing AI-generated models produced by Amsterdam-based company Lalaland.ai to add a wider range of body types and underrepresented demographics on its website. But after receiving widespread backlash, Levi clarified that it was not pulling back on its plans for live photo shoots, the use of live models or its commitment to working with diverse models.

"We do not see this (AI) pilot as a means to advance diversity or as a substitute for the real action that must be taken to deliver on our diversity, equity and inclusion goals and it should not have been portrayed as such," Levi said in its statement at the time.

The company last month said that it has no plans to scale the AI program.

The Associated Press reached out to several other retailers to ask whether they use AI fashion models. Target, Kohl's and fast-fashion giant Shein declined to comment; Temu did not respond to a request for comment.

Meanwhile, spokespeople for Nieman Marcus, H&M, Walmart and Macy's said their respective companies do not use AI models, although Walmart clarified that "suppliers may have a different approach to photography they provide for their products but we don't have that information."

Nonetheless, companies that generate AI models are finding a demand for the technology, including Lalaland.ai, which was co-founded by Michael Musandu after he was feeling frustrated by the absence of clothing models who looked like him.

"One model does not represent everyone that's actually shopping and buying a product," he said. "As a person of color, I felt this painfully myself."

Musandu says his product is meant to supplement traditional photo shoots, not replace them. Instead of seeing one model, shoppers could see nine to 12 models using different size filters, which would enrich their shopping experience and help reduce product returns and fashion waste.

The technology is actually creating new jobs, since Lalaland.ai pays humans to train its algorithms, Musandu said.

And if brands "are serious about inclusion efforts, they will continue to hire these models of color," he added.

London-based model Alexsandrah, who is Black, says her digital counterpart has helped her distinguish herself in the fashion industry. In fact, the real-life Alexsandrah has even stood in for a Black computer-generated model named Shudu, created by Cameron Wilson, a former fashion photographer turned CEO of The Diigitals, a U.K.-based digital modeling agency.

Wilson, who is white and uses they/them pronouns, designed Shudu in 2017, described on Instagram as the "The World's First Digital Supermodel." But critics at the time accused Wilson of cultural appropriation and digital Blackface.

Wilson took the experience as a lesson and transformed The Diigitals to make sure Shudu — who has been booked by Louis Vuitton and BMW — didn't take away opportunities but instead opened possibilities for women of color.

Alexsandrah, for instance, has modeled in-person as Shudu for Vogue Australia, and writer Ama Badu came up with Shudu's backstory and portrays her voice for interviews.

Alexsandrah said she is "extremely proud" of her work with The Diigitals, which created her own AI twin: "It's something that even when we are no longer here, the future generations can look back at and be like, 'These are the pioneers.'"

But for Yve Edmond, a New York City area-based model who works with major retailers to check the fit of clothing before it's sold to consumers, the rise of AI in fashion modeling feels more insidious.

Edmond worries modeling agencies and companies are taking advantage of models, who are generally independent contractors afforded few labor protections in the U.S., by using their photos to train AI systems without their consent or compensation.

She described one incident in which a client asked to photograph Edmond moving her arms, squatting and walking for "research" purposes. Edmond refused and later felt swindled — her modeling agency had told her she was being booked for a fitting, not to build an avatar.

"This is a complete violation," she said. "It was really disappointing for me."

But absent AI regulations, it's up to companies to be transparent and ethical about deploying AI technology. And Ziff, the founder of the Model Alliance, likens the current lack of legal protections for fashion workers to "the Wild West."

That's why the Model Alliance is pushing for legislation like the one being considered

Image: Kirsty Wigglesworth

in New York state, in which a provision of the Fashion Workers Act would require management companies and brands to obtain models' clear written consent to create or use a model's digital replica; specify the amount and duration of compensation, and prohibit altering or manipulating models' digital replica without consent.

Alexsandrah says that with ethical use and the right legal regulations, AI might open up doors for more models of color like herself. She has let her clients know that she has an AI replica, and she funnels any inquires for its use through Wilson, who she describes as "somebody that I know, love, trust and is my friend." Wilson says they make sure any compensation for Alexsandrah's AI is comparable to what she would make in-person.

Edmond, however, is more of a purist: "We have this amazing Earth that we're living on. And you have a person of every shade, every height, every size. Why not find that person and compensate that person?"

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CHARACTERS ENTER THE PUBLIC DOMAIN. WINNIE THE POOH BECOMES A KILLER. WHERE IS REMIX CULTURE GOING?

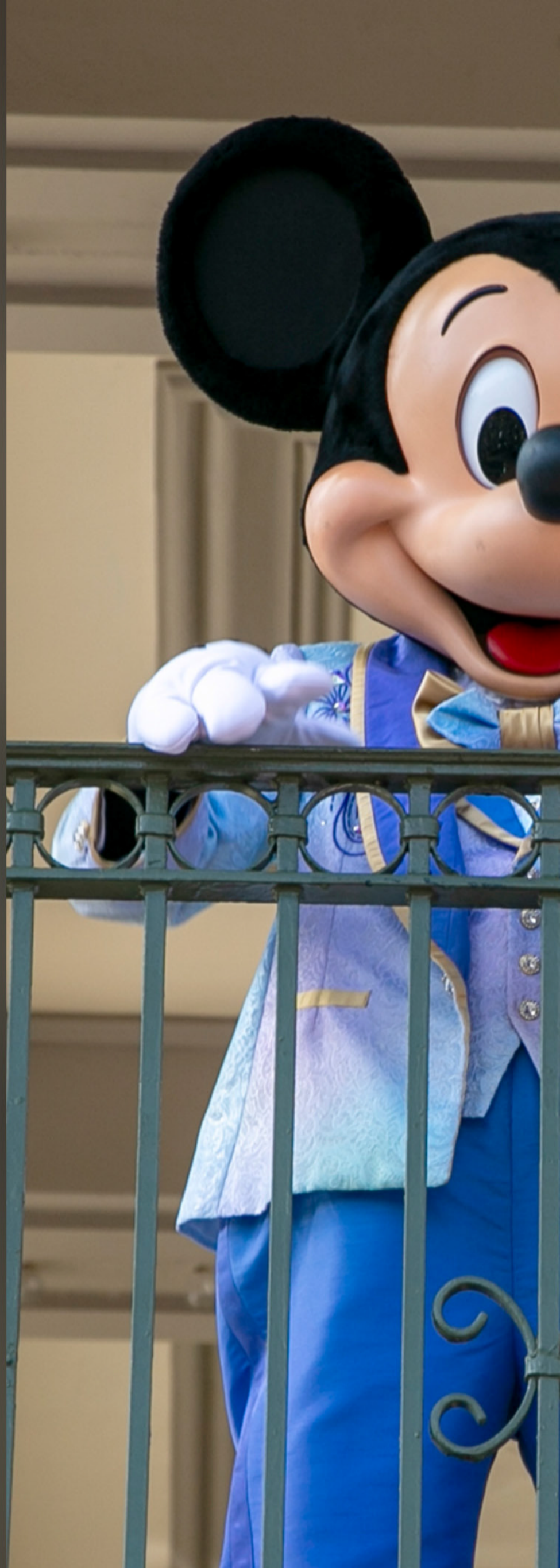
The giant stuffed bear, its face a twisted smile, lumbers across the screen. Menacing music swells. Shadows mask unknown threats. Christopher Robin begs for his life. And is that a sledgehammer about to pulverize a minor character's head?

Thus unfolds the trailer for the 2023 movie "Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey," a slasher-film riff on A.A. Milne's beloved characters, brought to you by ... the expiration of copyright and the arrival of the classic children's novel into the American public domain.

We were already living in an era teeming with remixes and repurposing, fan fictions and mashups. Then began a parade of characters and stories, led by Winnie the Pooh and Mickey Mouse with many more to follow, marching into the public domain, where anyone can do anything with anything and shape it into a new generation of stories and ideas.

After a two-decade drought brought on by congressional extensions of the copyright period in 1998, works again began entering the public domain — becoming available for use without licensing or payment — in 2019. The public began to notice in 2022, when Winnie the Pooh was freed for use as the 95-year copyright period elapsed on the novel that introduced him.

That made possible " Blood and Honey — not to mention a sequel that dropped last month, a forthcoming third and plans for a " Poohniverse " of twisted public domain characters including Bambi and Pinocchio. Pooh going public was followed this year by a moment many thought would never come: the copyright expiration on the original version of Mickey Mouse, as he appeared in the 1928 Walt Disney short, "Steamboat Willie."



The mouse and the bear are but the beginning. The heights of 20th century pop culture — Superman among them — lie ahead.

Classic characters, new stories, fresh mashups. Will it be all be a bonanza for makers? Are we entering a heyday of cross-generational collaboration or a plummet in intellectual property values as audiences get sick of seeing variations of the same old stories?

Does a murderous Pooh bear have something to show the 21st century entertainment world?

COULD THIS MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE?

Films from Hollywood's early talkie era have started to become public. King Kong, who has one of his enormous feet in the public domain already because of complications between companies that own a piece of him, will shed his remaining chains in 2029. Then, in the 2030s, Superman will soar into the public domain, followed in quick succession by Batman, the Joker and Wonder Woman.

The possibility of new stories is vast. So is the possibility of repetition. Classic stories and characters could get, well a bit tiresome.

"I don't feel like it's going to make that big a difference," says Phil Johnston, an Oscar nominee who co-wrote Disney's 2011 "Wreck It-Ralph" and co-wrote and co-directed its sequel, 2018's "Ralph Breaks the Internet."

"Like, 'Winnie the Pooh Blood and Honey' was was a novelty, made a bit of a splash, I guess. But if someone makes 'Steamboat Willie' (into) a jet ski movie or something, who cares?" he says. "If there's some great new idea behind it, maybe. But there's

nothing I'm looking at where I'm thinking, 'Oh, my God, now that 'The Jazz Singer' is available, I'm going to redo that.'"

Many creators were clearly anxious to do something with "The Great Gatsby," which has been subject to several reinterpretations in very different flavors since it became public in 2021, says Jennifer Jenkins, a professor of law and director of Duke's Center for the Study of Public Domain.

"We have our feminist retellings of `The Great Gatsby', where Jordan gets to tell the story from her perspective, Daisy gets to tell the story from her perspective," Jenkins says. "We got prequels, we got sequels, we've got musicals, TV shows, we've got the zombie version because we always do. These are things that you can do with public domain work. These are things that you can do with with Mickey Mouse."

But the newly available works and characters are arriving after years of parent corporations demanding that every creation be tied to their intellectual property. And with some big, " Barbie "-sized exceptions, the returns are growing thinner, and artists themselves are a little sick of it.

"The biggest limiting factor right now is that almost everything that anyone wants is has to be from existing IP," says Johnston, whose newest project is an animated adaptation of Roald Dahl's "The Twits" for Netflix. "And that that the notion of an original idea is somehow scary, certainly to a marketing entity, because they just have to work harder to get it into the public's consciousness. That's the bummer."

And while Shakespeare, Dickens and Austen have been public-domain gold mines at various times,

other properties have proven more problematic. The forthcoming "Wicked," starring Ariana Grande and Cynthia Erivo, will be yet another attempt at using the public-domain work of author Frank Baum's Oz — filtered through a hit novel and Broadway show — to glom onto the classic status of the 1939 "Wizard of Oz" film. Previous tries led to little success, and most were outright flops, most recently 2013's "Oz the Great and Powerful," from Disney.

IN THE BEGINNING, DISNEY LED THE WAY WITH PUBLIC DOMAIN SUCCESS

Some of the most effective use ever of public domain properties came from Disney itself in its early decades, turning time-tested folktales and novels into modern classics with "Snow White," "Pinocchio" and "Cinderella." It would later become the primary protector of the most valuable rights in entertainment, from the Marvel universe to the Star Wars galaxy to its homegrown content.

That has meant a major flowering through the years of fan art and fan fiction, with which the company has a mixed relationship.

"When you look at how the Disney organization actually engages with fan art, there's a lot of looking the other way," says Cory Doctorow, an author and activist who advocates for broader public ownership of works. "I always thought that there was so much opportunity for collaboration that was being missed there."

He gives as an example binders full of fan-fiction biographies of the ghosts at Disney World's Haunted Mansion, maintained by the teens who work there, which he observed when working on a project with the company's so-called Imagineers.

JUDY GARLAND

"Some of it actually is now part of the lore," Doctorow says. "I think that creatively that is an organization that really embraces that. I think commercially it's an organization that has really struggled with it."

When the law extending copyright by 20 years passed in 1998, musicians including Bob Dylan were among the key figures who had implored Congress to act. Younger generations of musicians, who came up awash in sampling and remixing, made no discernible outcry for another extension. In part this could be because in the streaming era, many of them make little off recorded music.

Jimmy Tamborello, who records and performs electronic music under the name Dntel and as part of The Postal Service — a group whose very name caused trademark headaches with the official version at its inception — says artists are generally happy to allow others to turn their work into new things. The problem is companies that come between them, and get most of the financial benefit.

"There's always a corporation involved," Tamborello says. "I think no one would care if it was just artists to artists. I feel like it would be nice if it was more open, more free. It seems like it has more to do with respecting the original work."

He says it was "really exciting" when the rapper Lil Peep used his hook from The Postal Service's best known song, "Such Great Heights" on a track released on YouTube and Soundcloud even before he made the proper legal arrangements to use it on an album.

Johnston says age and experience have made him feel less possessive about his own work.

“Earlier in my career, everything was an affront. Everything made me angry and like, ‘That was that was my idea! I should have had credit for that!’” he says. “I don’t want to say I’m just easy and breezy about it, but I think there are so few truly original ideas. .... We all kind of will have similar thoughts at a certain point. So it doesn’t particularly bother me.”

His attitude changes if the re-maker is not an artist but artificial intelligence. That was a key issue in last year’s Hollywood writers and actors strikes — and is yet another facet of remix culture that, alongside copyright expirations, could change the faces of some of history’s most renowned characters in ways no one has ever considered.

“If a writer feels for me, it’s fine,” Johnston says. “If an AI steals from me, that sucks.”

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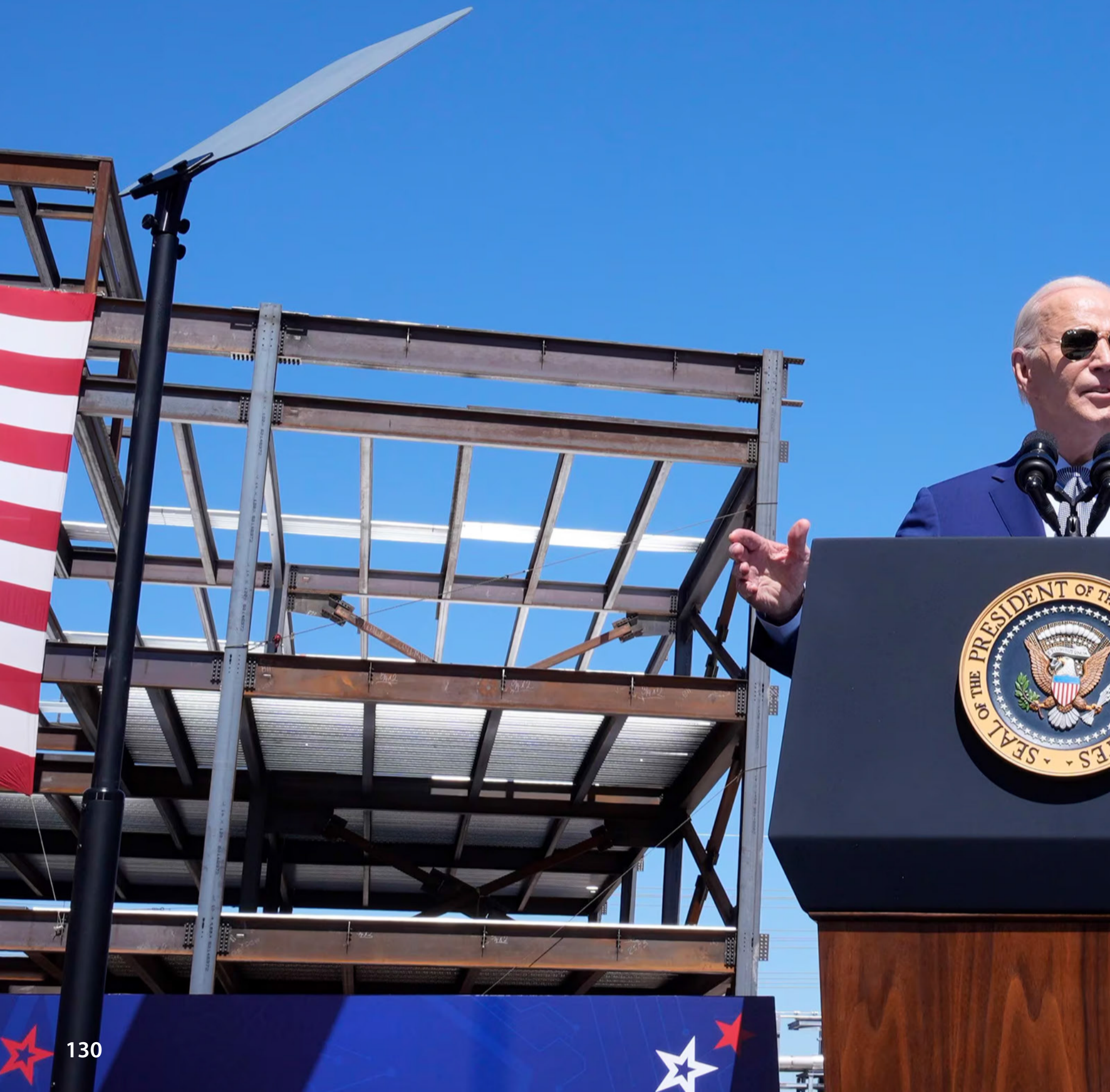
PLUSH BEDS

CALIFORNIA

SHOP NOW

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION AGREES TO PROVIDE $6.4 BILLION TO SAMSUNG FOR MAKING COMPUTER CHIPS IN TEXAS



The Biden administration has reached an agreement to provide up to $6.4 billion in direct funding for Samsung Electronics to develop a computer chip manufacturing and research cluster in Texas.

The funding announced this week by the Commerce Department is part of a total investment in the cluster that, with private money, is expected to exceed $40 billion. The government support comes from the CHIPS and Science Act, which President Joe Biden signed into law in 2022 with the goal of reviving the production of advanced computer chips domestically.

"The proposed project will propel Texas into a state of the art semiconductor ecosystem," Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said on a call with reporters. "It puts us on track to hit our goal of producing 20% of the world's leading edge chips in the United States by the end of the decade."

Raimondo said she expects the project will create at least 17,000 construction jobs and more than 4,500 manufacturing jobs.

Samsung's cluster in Taylor, Texas, would include two factories that would make four- and two-nanometer chips. Also, there would be a factory dedicated to research and development, as well as a facility for the packaging that surrounds chip components.

The first factory is expected to be operational in 2026, with the second being operational in 2027, according to the government.

The funding also would expand an existing Samsung facility in Austin, Texas.

Lael Brainard, director of the White House National Economic Council, said Samsung will

SUNG

be able to manufacture chips in Austin directly for the Defense Department as a result. Access to advanced technology has become a major national security concern amid competition between the U.S. and China.

In addition to the $6.4 billion, Samsung has indicated it also will claim an investment tax credit from the U.S. Treasury Department.

The government has previously announced terms to support other chipmakers including Intel and Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. in projects spread across the country.

NISSAN SAYS IT WILL MAKE NEXT-GENERATION EV BATTERIES BY EARLY 2029

Nissan expects to mass produce electric vehicles powered by advanced next-generation batteries by early 2029, the company said this week during a media tour of an unfinished pilot plant.

Japan's legacy automakers have fallen behind newer rivals like America's Tesla and China's BYD in the emerging all-electric auto sector.

But Nissan, like other companies, sees a chance to catch up and perhaps leap ahead with a new kind of battery that promises to be more powerful, cheaper, safer and faster to charge than the lithium-ion batteries in use today.

Image: Yuri Kageyama

Solid-state batteries, which replace the corrosive liquids found in conventional batteries with solid metals, are widely seen as the next step for EVs, and leading automakers are racing to develop versions that can be mass produced.

Rivals like Volkswagen and Toyota have also announced efforts to produce solid-state EVs, with Toyota setting a date of 2027-28 to begin bringing them to market.

But substantial challenges remain before the technology reaches commercial mass production.

The sprawling facility Nissan showed off Tuesday was still mostly empty, but company officials said it's scheduled to begin operating a pilot production line by March 2025, with commercial production of EVs there set to start in fiscal year 2028, which runs from April 2028 to March 2029.

Image: Yuri Kageyama

"Once electric vehicles get going, costs will come down compared to the internal combustion engine. They will also be so convenient. For one, you won't ever have to go to a gas stand," Executive Vice President Hideyuki Sakamoto told reporters at a tour of the sprawling facility southwest of Tokyo.

"The engineers at Nissan are all working hard to create this new world," said Sakamoto.

Nissan officials offer few details about many aspects of the technology, as well as the amount of investment and global production plans.

They said the company had come up with key, unique materials for the batteries, including a metal form of lithium.

Nissan was an EV pioneer, introducing the all-electric Leaf in 2010. The company said it plans to offer solid-state batteries in a range of models, including pickup trucks.

"We are finally in the phase of scaling up on our all-solid-state battery line," said Shunichi Inamijima, corporate vice president.

"Our all-solid-state battery technology is a game-changer for making EV sales grow explosively."

NISSAN

AMAZON REMOVED JUST WALK OUT FROM MANY OF ITS OWN STORES BUT WANTS TO SELL THE SYSTEM TO OTHERS

NO CHECKOUT.
SERIOUSLY.)
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Amazon wants the public and - especially other businesses - to know it's not giving up on its Just Walk Out technology.

Although the company is ditching the cashier-less checkout system at its Amazon Fresh grocery stores, it plans to sell the technology to more than 120 third-party businesses by the end of the year. Reaching that goal would double the number of non-Amazon enterprises that use Just Walk Out compared to last year.

"For us, really making sure that we can service that third-party market is the most important thing," Jon Jenkins, the vice president of Just Walk Out at Amazon, said in an interview. "We've definitely been reassuring people that we are in this for the long haul."

Just Walk Out uses cameras, artificial intelligence and sensor trackers to determine what's taken off of shelves, enabling customers to grab what they want and leave if they insert a credit card or another payment method at a store's entry gate.

The retailer first began offering the technology to other businesses – such as sports stadiums - in 2020, two years after it started using it at Amazon Go convenience stores. Those stores and some Amazon Fresh stores in the U.K. will continue to offer Just Walk Out. But the technology will be replaced with smart carts at Fresh stores in the U.S., Amazon announced this month.

Smart carts, which are already available in some Amazon Fresh locations, use sensors to identify items placed inside and have screens that allow customers to see nearby deals as well as how much their groceries will cost. Customers can skip the checkout line by scanning and tallying up items on its cameras.

More bread
for less dough.
89¢ a loaf
ORGANIC
ORGANIC
SALE
$3.99
99¢ EACH
$3.99
$7.49 EACH
$2.39
$4.39
$4.99
$5.15
SALE
$5.29
SALAD DRESSING
CONDIMENTS

The change comes as Amazon is working to revamp its Fresh stores with a mix of technology and traditional grocery offerings that will help it attract more customers. The company's grocery store brands include Amazon Fresh and Amazon Go, as well as supermarket chain Whole Foods, which it purchased in 2017 for $13.7 billion.

But Amazon's efforts to become a giant in the U.S. grocery market hasn't been easy. Early last year, CEO Andy Jassy wrote in his annual letter to shareholders that the company was working to find the formula that would allow it to make a larger impact in brick-and-mortar grocery stores.

Jenkins argued that removing Just Walk Out from U.S. Amazon Fresh stores did not reflect a miscalculation by the company. Instead, he described the decision as an outgrowth of an experimentation process to figure out what does and doesn't work for shoppers.

"What we found is customers in big grocery stores want a shopping assistant to travel along with them," he said. Meanwhile, "shoppers in smaller store formats tend to be very mission driven. They want to get in and out quickly, with as little friction as possible."

Abandoning the technology in many of its own stores could make it challenging for Amazon to sell Just Walk Out to other businesses. But some experts think the move also could expand adoption among smaller-format stores and locations akin to Amazon Go stores.

John Clear, a senior director at the professional services firm Alvarez & Marsal, says he believes cashier-less technology is going to become more common in grab-and-go shopping areas where human interaction tends to be limited, labor is

JUST
WALK
OUT
SHOPPING

hard to come by and businesses are almost always attempting to cut down on costs.

"We're seeing a natural evolution of the technology, kind of expanding where it's working" and drawing back where it's not, Clear said.

In its attempt to sell its technology to other businesses, Amazon is also trying to counter some recent viral social media posts that claimed the checkout system was not a technological marvel but was instead powered by contractors in India who manually added up items in carts as customers shopped.

Business publication The Information and news website Vox reported in the past that Amazon used human reviewers for the technology, which the company has acknowledged. Jenkins said the company hires associates who take some video clips and label them so they can be used to train the machine learning system.

But the notion "people in India are watching you shop live in a store and figuring out what you bought is completely inaccurate," he said.

In some cases, when the system was not able to figure out what happened in a store, a human watches a snippet of video to make sure the receipt a customer received was accurate, Jenkins added. Such reviews happen in a "small minority" of cases, he said, declining to give an estimate.

Jenkins also declined to share how many people the company has hired to review and label videos. However, he said it was less than the 1,000 figure cited in media reports.

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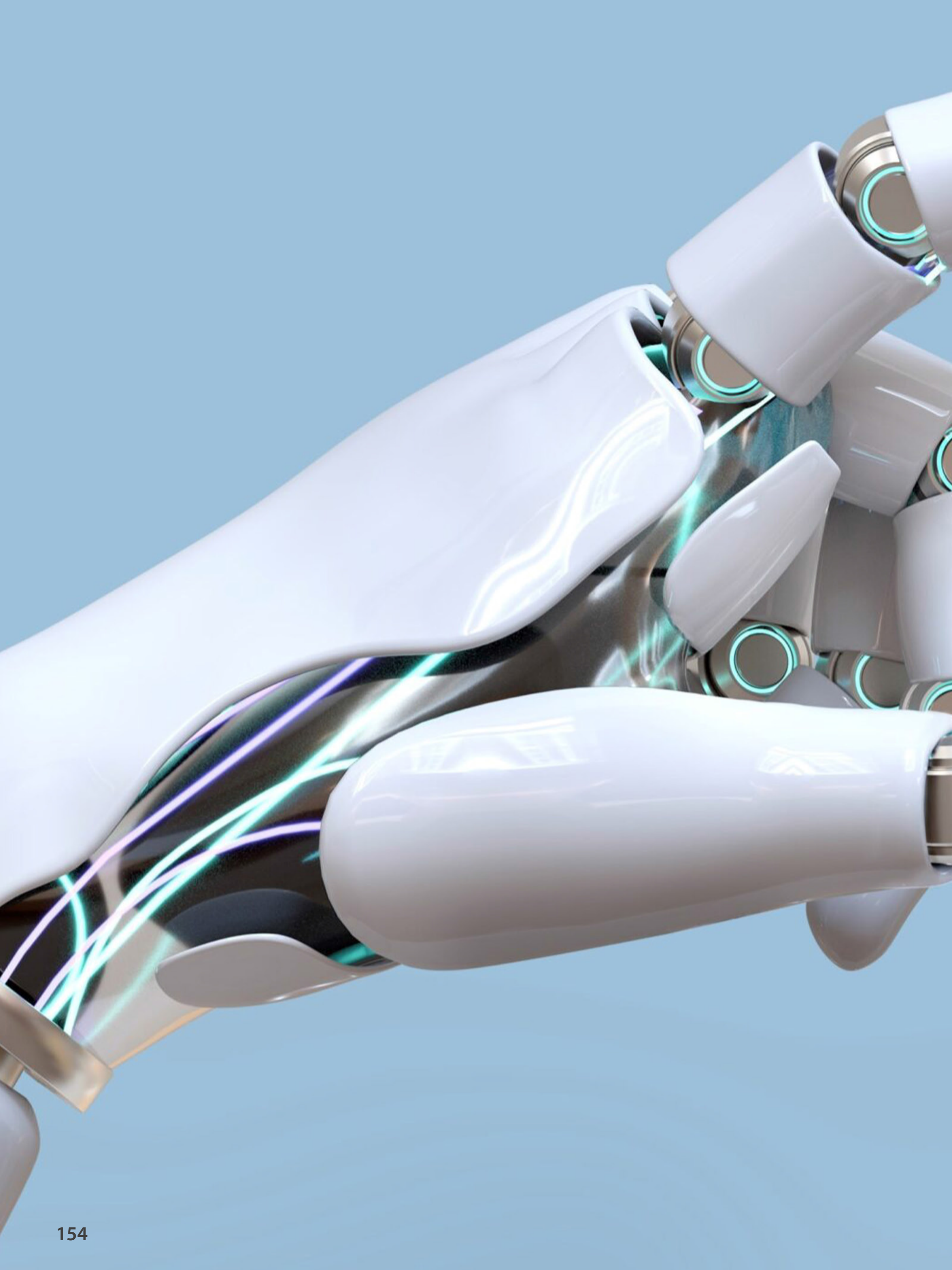
MASSACHUSETTS OFFICIAL WARNS AI SYSTEMS SUBJECT TO CONSUMER PROTECTION, ANTI-BIAS LAWS

Developers, suppliers, and users of artificial intelligence must comply with existing state consumer protection, anti-discrimination, and data privacy laws, the Massachusetts attorney general cautioned this week.

In an advisory, Attorney General Andrea Campbell pointed to what she described as the widespread increase in the use of AI and algorithmic decision-making systems by businesses, including technology focused on consumers.



The advisory is meant in part to emphasize that existing state consumer protection, anti-discrimination, and data security laws still apply to emerging technologies, including AI systems — despite the complexity of those systems — just as they would in any other context.

"There is no doubt that AI holds tremendous and exciting potential to benefit society and our commonwealth in many ways, including fostering innovation and boosting efficiencies and cost-savings in the marketplace," Cambell said in a statement.

"Yet, those benefits do not outweigh the real risk of harm that, for example, any bias and lack of transparency within AI systems, can cause our residents," she added.

Falsely advertising the usability of AI systems, supplying an AI system that is defective, and misrepresenting the reliability or safety of an AI system are just some of the actions that could be considered unfair and deceptive under the state's consumer protection laws, Campbell said.

Misrepresenting audio or video content of a person for the purpose of deceiving another to engage in a business transaction or supply personal information as if to a trusted business partner — as in the case of deepfakes, voice cloning, or chatbots used to engage in fraud — could also violate state law, she added.

The goal, in part, is to help encourage companies to ensure that their AI products and services are free from bias before they enter the commerce stream — rather than face consequences afterward.

Regulators also say that companies should be disclosing to consumers when they

are interacting with algorithms. A lack of transparency could run afoul of consumer protection laws.

Elizabeth Mahoney of the Massachusetts High Technology Council, which advocates for the state's technology economy, said that because there might be some confusion about how state and federal rules apply to the use of AI, it's critical to spell out state law clearly.

"We think having ground rules is important and protecting consumers and protecting data is a key component of that," she said.

Campbell acknowledges in her advisory that AI holds the potential to help accomplish great benefits for society even as it has also been shown to pose serious risks to consumers, including bias and the lack of transparency.

Developers and suppliers promise that their AI systems and technology are accurate, fair, and effective even as they also claim that AI is a "black box", meaning that they do not know exactly how AI performs or generates results, she said in her advisory.

The advisory also notes that the state's anti-discrimination laws prohibit AI developers, suppliers, and users from using technology that discriminates against individuals based on a legally protected characteristic — such as technology that relies on discriminatory inputs or produces discriminatory results that would violate the state's civil rights laws, Campbell said.

AI developers, suppliers, and users also must take steps to safeguard personal data used by AI systems and comply with the state's data breach notification requirements, she added.

MICROSOFT INVESTS $1.5 BILLION IN AI FIRM G42, OVERSEEN BY UAE'S NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISER

crosoft

GITEX AFRICA
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GITEX AFRICA
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MOU CEREMONY 31 MAY 2023
G42
INAUGURAL EDITION 20

Microsoft is investing $1.5 billion in a technology firm based in the United Arab Emirates and overseen by the country's powerful national security adviser.

Microsoft and the technology holding company G42 announced the deal Tuesday. As part of the agreement, Microsoft's president, Brad Smith, will join G42's board of directors.

The deal "was developed in close consultation with both the UAE and U.S. governments," Microsoft said.

Based in Abu Dhabi, G42 runs data centers in the Middle East and elsewhere and has increasingly identified itself as an AI firm. It has built what's considered the world's leading Arabic-language AI model, known as Jais.

Microsoft said G42 will run its AI applications and services on the U.S. tech giant's cloud computing platform, and the two companies will work to bring digital infrastructure to countries where G42 has established a presence in the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa.

G42 has previously said it would cut ties to Chinese hardware suppliers over American concerns it was too close to the Chinese government.

The company has faced spying allegations for its ties to a mobile phone app identified as spyware. It has also faced claims it could have gathered genetic material secretly from Americans for the Chinese government.

Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the UAE's national security adviser, is chairman of the company's board.

The U.S. Commerce Department on Tuesday described the UAE as a "global player in cutting edge technology" and said it is working with it and other countries toward "verifiable commitments" for the safe development and deployment of such technologies.

"When responsibly managed, investments like the one announced today have the potential to further innovation in digital technologies around the world," spokesperson Brittany Caplin said in a written statement.

crosoft

Image: Ebrahim Noroozi

TESLA TO ASK SHAREHOLDERS TO REINSTATE $55 BILLION PAY PACKAGE FOR MUSK REJECTED BY DELAWARE JUDGE

Tesla will ask shareholders to reinstate a compensation package for CEO Elon Musk potentially worth $55 billion that was rejected by a judge in Delaware this year and to move the electric car maker's corporate home from Delaware to Texas.

In a filing with federal regulators this week, the company said it would ask shareholders to vote on both issues during its annual meeting in June.

In January, Chancellor Kathaleen St. Jude McCormick ruled that Musk is not entitled to a landmark compensation package awarded by Tesla's board of directors.

Image: Liesa Johannssen-Koppitz

Five years ago, a Tesla shareholder lawsuit alleged that the pay package should be voided because it was dictated by Musk and was the product of sham negotiations with directors who were not independent of him.

It may be a tough sell for Tesla and Musk in June. Shares of Tesla Inc. have tumbled nearly 40% this year as global demand for electric vehicles fades and Tesla sales have fallen rapidly.

Musk said a month after the judge's ruling that he would try to move Tesla's corporate listing to Texas, where he has already moved company headquarters.

Almost immediately after the judge's ruling, Musk did exactly that with Neuralink, his brain implant company, moving its corporate home from Delaware to Nevada.

In a letter to shareholders this week, Chairperson Robyn Denholm said that Musk has delivered on the growth it was looking for at the automaker, with Tesla meeting all of the 2018 CEO pay package targets.

Image: Chris Carlson

"Because the Delaware Court second-guessed your decision, Elon has not been paid for any of his work for Tesla for the past six years that has helped to generate significant growth and stockholder value," Denholm wrote. "That strikes us — and the many stockholders from whom we already have heard — as fundamentally unfair, and inconsistent with the will of the stockholders who voted for it."

Tesla made and delivered more than 1.8 million electric vehicles worldwide in 2023, according to a regulatory filing. But its shares have lost about one-third of their value so far this year as sales of electric vehicles soften.

Image: Christian Mang

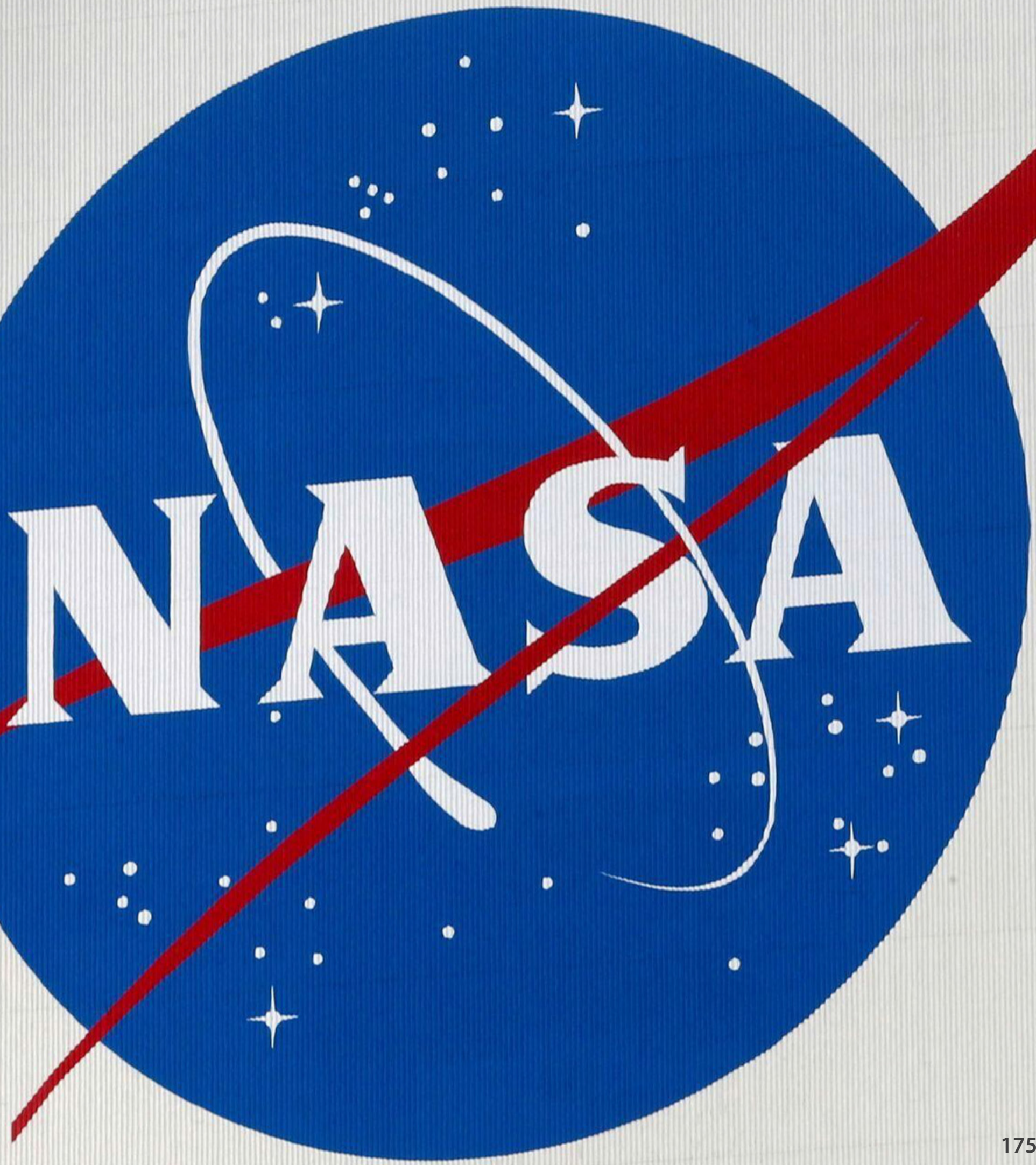
Yet Tesla sales are now falling sharply and it may be a challenge to get shareholders to back a fatter pay package in an environment where competition has increased worldwide and demand for electric vehicle sales is fading. Massive price cuts at Tesla have failed to draw more buyers. The company said it delivered 386,810 vehicles from January through March, nearly 9% fewer than it delivered in the same period last year.

Since last year, Tesla has cut prices as much as $20,000 on some models. The price cuts caused used electric vehicle values to drop and clipped Tesla's profit margins.

This week, Tesla said it was letting about 10% of its workers go, about 14,000 people.

Tesla will hold its annual shareholders meeting on June 13.

NASA IS SEEKING A FASTER AND CHEAPER WAY TO BRING MARS SAMPLES TO EARTH


NASA

NASA's plan to bring samples from Mars back to Earth is on hold until there's a faster, cheaper way, space agency officials said.

Retrieving Mars soil and rocks has been on NASA's to-do list for decades, but the date kept moving forward, as costs ballooned. A recent independent review put the total cost at $8 billion to $11 billion, with an arrival date of 2040, about a decade later than advertised.

NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said that's too much and too late. He's asking private industry and the space agency's centers to come up with other options to revamp the project. With NASA facing across-the-board budget cuts, he wants to avoid gutting other science projects to finance the Mars sample project.

"We want to get every new and fresh idea that we can," he said at a news conference.

NASA's rover Perseverance already has gathered 24 core samples in tubes since landing in 2021 at Mars' Jezero Crater, an ancient river delta. The goal is more than 30 samples to scour for possible signs of ancient Martian life.

The space agency wants to get at least some of the collected samples to Earth sometime in the 2030s for no more than the $7 billion. That would require a spacecraft that goes to Mars to get the tubes and launches off the planet. Then it must rendezvous with yet another spacecraft that would bring the samples to Earth.

NASA's science mission chief, Nicky Fox, refused to speculate at the news conference when the samples might arrive at Earth, given a new program and timeline, or even how many samples might be returned. That information will be included in any proposals, she said.

"We've never launched from another planet, and that's actually what makes Mars sample return such a challenging and interesting mission," Fox said.

Scientists are eager to analyze pristine samples from Mars in their own labs, far superior to the kind of rudimentary testing done by spacecraft at the red planet. It will take such in-depth testing to confirm any evidence of microscopic life dating back billions of years when water flowed on the planet, according to NASA.

The samples will help NASA decide where astronauts go on Mars in the 2040s, Nelson said.

NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, had been in charge of the sample project. It was hit by hundreds of layoffs earlier this year due to all the budget cutbacks. Nelson is seeking ideas from across the space agency, with the revamped program more spread out.

NASA hopes to receive any ideas by late fall.

UBER AND LYFT DELAY THEIR PLANS TO LEAVE MINNEAPOLIS AFTER OFFICIALS PUSH BACK DRIVER PAY PLAN

Uber
lyft
AUTHORIZED TNC VEHICLE
WADIM

MULDA
MINNESOTA UBER/LYFT
DRIVER ASSOCIATION
FAIRNESS FOR DRIVERS

The ride-hailing companies Uber and Lyft said they will delay their planned exit from Minneapolis after city officials decided to push back the start of a driver pay raise by two months.

The Minneapolis City Council voted unanimously to implement the ordinance on July 1 instead of May 1. Some council members said this gives other ride-hailing companies more time to establish themselves in the market before Uber and Lyft potentially leave, and it gives Minnesota lawmakers a chance to pass statewide rules on pay for ride-hailing drivers.

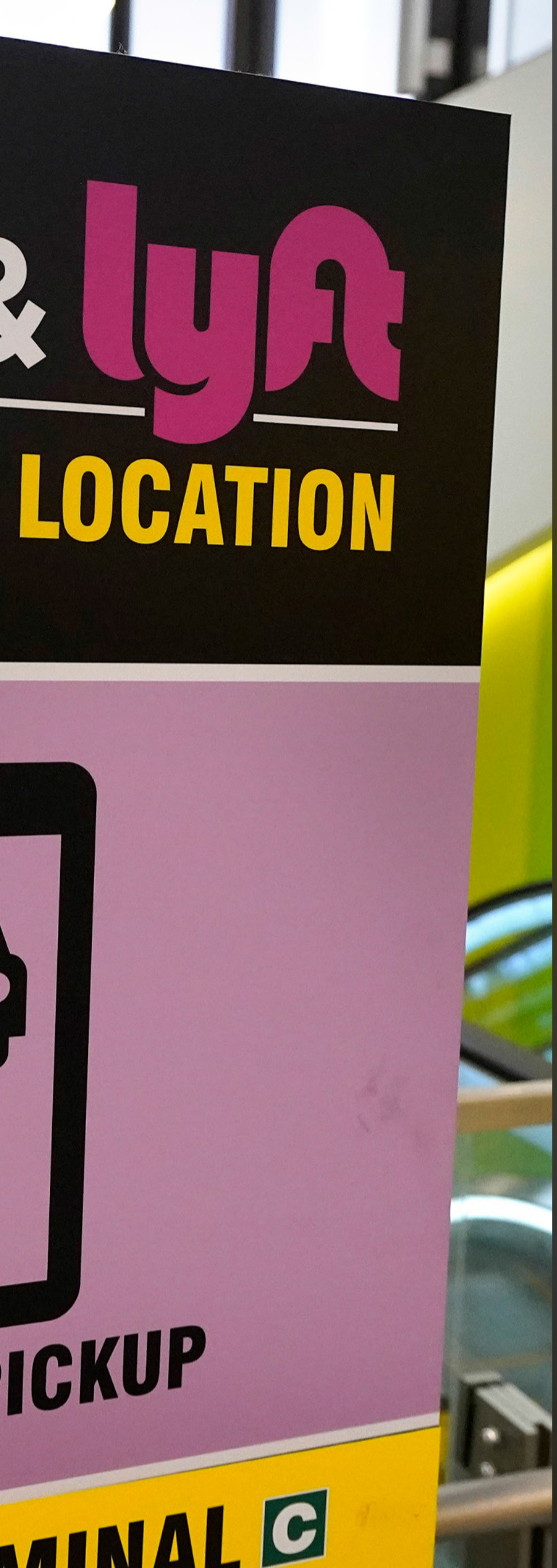
Council member Robin Wonsley, the lead author of the ordinance, said the delay would lead to better outcomes for drivers and riders, and lay a stronger foundation for a more equitable ride-hailing industry statewide. She called the current industry model "extremely exploitative."

Under the ordinance, ride-hailing companies must pay drivers at least $1.40 per mile and $0.51 per minute — or $5 per ride, whichever is greater — excluding tips, for the time spent transporting passengers in Minneapolis.

The change aims to ensure companies pay drivers the equivalent of the city's minimum wage of $15.57 per hour after accounting for gas and other expenses. However, a recent study commissioned by the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry found that a lower rate of $0.89 per mile and $0.49 per minute would meet the $15.57 goal.

Uber and Lyft representatives say they can support the lower rate from the state's study but not the city's higher rate. Uber says it would end operations in the entire Minneapolis-St. Paul

Uber &
NEW PICKUP
RIDE APP P



metropolitan area — a seven-county region with 3.2 million people — while Lyft would only stop serving Minneapolis.

Lyft said the city's rate "will make rides too expensive for most riders, meaning drivers will ultimately earn less. This is unsustainable for our customers."

Uber also warned of decreased demand, saying even the state study's rate would still "likely lead to lower hourly pay since drivers will spend more time in between rides waiting for passengers," company spokesperson Josh Gold said.

Some state legislators have proposed preempting, or overriding, the city ordinance with a state law.

Uber and Lyft previously pulled out of Austin, Texas, in 2016, after the city pushed for fingerprint-based background checks of drivers as a rider safety measure. The companies returned after the Texas Legislature overrode the local measure and passed a law implementing different rules statewide.

At the Minnesota Legislature, Democratic House Majority Leader Jamie Long of Minneapolis said he hopes ongoing negotiations between state and city officials can help resolve the dispute.

"I think that we will get to a result that's going to keep the companies operating and is going to protect the drivers," Long told reporters. "I'm really hoping that we can avoid preemption."

Uber and Lyft drivers in the Minneapolis area are divided on the driver pay issue.

Muhiyidin Yusuf, 49, supports the ordinance. Yusuf said he works as an Uber and Lyft

driver for about 60 hours each week but still relies on government assistance and accused the companies of making big profits while he struggles.

"I'm doing all of the work. But they are taking a majority of the money," said Yusuf, who immigrated from Somalia in 2010. He's one of many African immigrants in the Minneapolis area who work as Uber and Lyft drivers and have advocated for the rate increase in recent years.

Maureen Marrin, a part-time Uber and Lyft driver, opposes the ordinance. Marrin said she earns an average of $40 per hour while driving and doesn't understand how other drivers earn less than the equivalent of minimum wage.

"I'm fortunate. I'm retired, I have another source of income, so it's also easier for me to make more money because I can pick and choose," Marrin said. "But I'm worried they (Uber and Lyft) are going to leave and will be replaced by something that we don't even know what we're getting."

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FACED WITH POSSIBLY PAYING FOR NEWS, GOOGLE REMOVES LINKS TO CALIFORNIA NEWS SITES FOR SOME USERS

Google began removing California news websites from some people's search results, a test that acted as a threat should the state Legislature pass a law requiring the search giant to pay media companies for linking to their content.

Google announced the move in a blog post, calling it a "short-term test for a small percentage of users ... to measure the impact of the legislation on our product experience." The company said it also would pause new investments in the California news industry, including the partnership initiative with news organizations and its product licensing program.

Image: Sebastian Moss

Image: Solen Feyissa

"By helping people find news stories, we help publishers of all sizes grow their audiences at no cost to them. (This bill) would up-end that model," Jaffer Zaidi, Google's vice president for global news partnerships, wrote in the blog post.

The California Legislature is considering a bill that would require tech giants like Google, Facebook and Microsoft to pay a certain percentage of advertising revenue to media companies for linking to their content. How much the companies would have to pay would be decided by a panel of three judges through an arbitration process.

The bill aims to stop the loss of journalism jobs, which have been disappearing rapidly as legacy media companies have struggled to profit in the digital age. More than 2,500 newspapers have closed in the U.S. since 2005, according to Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism. California has lost more than 100 news organizations in the past decade, according to Democratic Assemblymember Buffy Wicks, the bill's author.

"This is a bill about basic fairness — it's about ensuring that platforms pay for the content they repurpose," Wicks said. "We are committed to continuing negotiations with Google and all other stakeholders to secure a brighter future for California journalists and ensure that the lights of democracy stay on."

The state Assembly passed the bill last year with bipartisan support despite fierce opposition and lobbying efforts from big tech companies. The California Senate would have to pass it later this year for it to become law.

Supporters said the legislation would help level the playing field between news publishers and large digital platforms and provide a "lifeline" to local news organizations, which rely heavily on Google's search engine to distribute its content in the digital era. While Google's search engine has become the hub of a digital advertisement empire that generates more than $200 billion annually, news publishers saw their advertising revenues nosedive significantly in the last few decades.

But opponents, including Google, Meta and some independent newsrooms, call the legislation a "link tax" that would primarily benefit out-of-state newspaper chains and hedge funds and further decimate local news organizations. Richard Gingras, Google's vice president of news, also told state lawmakers, in a hearing last December, that Google already made significant contributions to support local journalism, pointing to the tech giant's financial grants and training to nearly 1,000 local publications in 2023, among other programs.

Google's search engine should be seen as "the largest newsstand on Earth," Gingras said, where it helps connect users to news websites more than 24 billion times per month. Google's search engine holds an estimated 90% share of the market.

"This traffic in turn helps publishers make money by showing ads or attracting new subscribers," he said, adding that it's estimated that each click on a link from Google is worth 5 cents to 7 cents to a news website.

Google's decision to temporarily remove links to news websites is not a new tactic for tech giants to use when pushing back on unwanted legislation. When Canada and Australia passed similar laws to promote journalism, Meta — the company that owns Facebook and Instagram — responded by blocking content from Canadian publishers on its sites in Canada. The company made similar threats to U.S. Congress and California lawmakers last year. Google had threatened to do the same in Canada. But in November, Google agreed to pay 100 million Canadian dollars ($74 million U.S. dollars) to the news industry.

News publishers would suffer and could lay off more journalists if Google completely blocks content from its search, but experts say Google also would take a financial hit without news content.

"Google would be damaging itself enormously if it decided to stop using newspaper content," Brandon Kressin, an antitrust attorney representing News Media Alliance and other news publishers, told lawmakers in a December hearing. "They would be cutting off their nose to spite their own face."

The political wrangling over Google's dominant search engine can throttle access to various news sources comes against the backdrop of legal trouble that could culminate in decisions that undercut the company's internet empire.

After presenting evidence to support its allegations that Google has been abusing its power to stifle competition and innovation during the biggest antitrust trial in a quarter century, lawyers for the U.S. Justice Department

will present its closing arguments next month to a federal judge who is expected to issue a decision in the case later this year.

Following another antitrust trial that ended in December, a federal jury concluded Google had turned its app store for smartphones running on its Android software into an illegal monopoly that limited consumer choices while enriching the company through unfairly high commissions charged for in-app purchases. A hearing on the changes that Google will have to make resulting from that verdict is also scheduled to occur next month.

California has attempted to boost local journalism through various initiatives, including a $25 million multiyear, state-funded program in partnership with UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism to place 40 early-career journalists in local newsrooms annually. Lawmakers are also considering another proposal that would expand tax credits for local news organizations this year.

EUROPEAN UNION QUESTIONS TIKTOK ON NEW APP THAT PAYS USERS FOR WATCHING

TikTo

European Union regulators said this week they're seeking details from TikTok on a new app from the video sharing platform that pays users to watch videos.

The European Commission said it sent TikTok a "request for information" on the TikTok Lite app that has been quietly released in France and Spain.

The commission wants to know about the risk assessment that TikTok should have carried out before deploying the app in the European Union.

"We have already been in direct contact with the Commission regarding this product and will respond to the request for information," TikTok said in a statement.

Such evaluations are required under the bloc's Digital Services Act, a sweeping law that took effect last year with the aim of cleaning up social media platforms. The commission is the 27-nation bloc's executive arm and top enforcer of digital regulations.

TikTok Lite lets users "earn great rewards," according to its app store listing. The app, which launched this month in France and Spain, is a slimmed-down version of the main TikTok app and doesn't come with ecommerce or livestreaming features.

The commission said the app lets users earn points by doing things like watching videos, liking content and following content creators. The points can be exchanged for rewards including Amazon vouchers and gift cards on PayPal.

TikTok said rewards are restricted to users 18 years and older, who have to verify their age. Users can watch up to one hour a day of videos to earn rewards, which are capped at the equivalent of one euro ($1.06) a day, it said.

TikTok has 24 hours to turn over the risk assessment. The commission is interested in what it says about the app's potential impact on the protection of minors, "as well as on the mental health of users, in particular in relation to the potential stimulation of addictive behaviour."

It's also seeking other information on the measures TikTok has put in place to mitigate such "systemic risks," which the company has until April 26 to provide.

TikTok

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